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Administration of Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) and the Better Schools Fund



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Report presented by the Auditor General for Wales to
the National Assembly on 8 February 2006



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Summary

- 1 The Better Schools Fund provides targeted grant support for Local Education Authorities (LEAs)¹ to assist them with the development of new initiatives and innovative ways of improving standards of teaching and attainment in schools. The Fund may be used by LEAs to assist with the implementation of their Education Strategic Plans. The Welsh Assembly Government (Assembly Government) provides the Fund alongside other targeted funding, such as Additional Revenue for Schools and support for Early Years Learning.
 - 2 The Assembly Government introduced the Better Schools Fund in 2004/2005 as the successor to Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST). The Better Schools Fund is focused more closely than was GEST on the Assembly Government's strategic priorities, and eligible activity and priority areas, as well as the core administrative arrangements for the scheme, are set out in an annual circular. For 2005/2006, gross funding, including local authority matched funding, is £49.4 million.
 - 3 GEST was originally set up as a partnership between the (then) Welsh Office and the LEAs in Wales. Annual allocations for individual LEAs were set on the basis of a formula agreed with local authorities and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and the scheme provided funding for most eligible expenditure at a rate of 60 per cent, with local authorities contributing the balance from their unhypothecated² revenue settlements.
 - 4 GEST was the largest single source of Assembly Government funding for in-service training and other school development activities, and our initial scoping work found that in some respects its operation was complex. We therefore set out to establish whether any improvements could be made to the way in which the scheme was being run. During the course of our examination, GEST was replaced by the Better Schools Fund. Accordingly, we refocused our work to also take account of what was done in the transition and to identify what further improvements were needed to the administration of the new scheme.
- GEST was established to help raise standards in schools, but some aspects of its design and administration were not conducive to the achievement of that objective**
- 5 GEST was an important means of enabling LEAs and schools to improve school standards. But the programme had been running for several years and, despite changes from year to year in some areas, it had continued to support broadly the same range and type of activities. As a result, LEAs and schools had come to regard it as a source of recurrent revenue funding rather than a programme specifically focused on raising standards.
 - 6 The number of activity areas varied from year to year, rising to 19 in 2000/2001. In 2000/2001, the Assembly Government carried out a review of the programme, in consultation with the Assembly's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, and

¹ Throughout the report we refer to the local authorities in Wales that have responsibility for the provision of education in schools as Local Education Authorities (LEAs).

² Unhypothecated means that the funds were not allocated in advance to a specific purpose.

reduced the number of activity areas to ten. The Assembly Government made this change to demonstrate more clearly how the activities funded by GEST related to its priorities for education, and to streamline administration.

- 7 Each year the Assembly Government consulted LEAs and other relevant parties on the activity and priority areas to be supported by the scheme. This consultation was an important feature of partnership working. In practice, however, consultation was often largely focused on the draft text of the annual circular, and some LEAs did not feel sufficiently informed about the relationship between emerging policy priorities and eligible expenditure in GEST.
- 8 The GEST planning cycle was based on the financial year, starting in April, in line with central government and local government finance generally. The Assembly Government aimed to notify LEAs of their allocations eight months ahead of the school academic year, but often there was slippage against key milestones in the GEST cycle, which was vulnerable to staff turnover, staff sickness and competing priorities. Half of LEAs told us that significant slippage in the cycle caused them difficulties in securing matched funding from their revenue settlements and in committing GEST funding to their Education Strategic Plans, and difficulties for schools in planning for the first term of the programme year, the Summer term.
- 9 As part of the annual GEST cycle, the Assembly Government assessed and approved LEAs' spending plans prior to the final allocation of grant. The wide range of activities covered by the programme meant that plans were assessed by a number of Assembly Government officials, each of whom had responsibility for the different areas of policy supported by GEST, and by Estyn District Inspectors. As a result, assessments were sometimes completed inconsistently, and did not

always include a thorough analysis of management information on programme activities and the likely effectiveness of proposals.

- 10 In line with the partnership approach adopted for GEST, LEAs were given considerable flexibility to move money across the programme after spending plans had been approved, so that they could deliver against broad objectives in a way that reflected local priorities and circumstances, and to cope with in-year pressures. However, the flexibility to move resources across a widely scoped programme made it more difficult to monitor and assess the impact of funding on the achievement of specific objectives.

The Better Schools Fund overcomes some of the shortcomings of GEST but there is scope for further improvement

- 11 The Assembly Government introduced the Better Schools Fund in 2004/2005, following an internal review of GEST. As a result, administration has become more streamlined, simpler to understand and a little less costly to administer. Changes were introduced progressively, including a number of transitional measures to enable LEAs to adapt to the new funding regime. However, a number of improvements remain to be implemented fully, and some of the shortcomings of GEST remain.
- 12 As part of the transitional measures, for 2004/2005 the Assembly Government relaxed controls over LEAs' movement of resources between different parts of the scheme. But in 2005/2006 it strengthened these substantially. While the Assembly Government still does not require LEAs to achieve a fixed set of objectives with their allocations, but rather allows them to plan their activities within a range of parameters set out in the annual circular, it has made the parameters clearer. This change should help the Assembly Government to monitor better the use



of funds and their impact. Reduced funding has also led to measures to increase efficiency in the way supported activities are administered. For example, some schools have pooled resources to reduce overheads.

- 13** There have been improved efforts to consult LEAs on the development of the Better Schools Fund. These have included a series of regional meetings in 2004/2005 to discuss issues arising with the new programme and possible priorities for 2005/2006, and one-to-one meetings with individual LEAs in 2005/2006 to give direct feedback on their spending plans and discuss possible priorities for 2006/2007. The Assembly Government told us that these measures have been welcomed by LEAs. Dialogue with other relevant bodies, such as Estyn and the WLGA, has also improved. However, there is scope to improve the participation of Assembly Government policy leads in consultation meetings with LEAs, to explain the policy thinking behind changes to activity and priority areas funded under the programme.
- 14** The Better Schools Fund planning cycle continues to be based on the financial year, starting in April, and significant slippage against the cycle continued for 2004/2005 and 2005/2006. The Assembly Government has adhered to all the key planning milestones for 2006/2007 and is on target to confirm allocations in January 2006.
- 15** There continues to be scope for improving the assessment of LEA spending plans. As part of the transitional arrangements for the new programme, and to alleviate difficulties caused by delayed publication of the annual circular, the Assembly Government permitted LEAs to submit spending plans for 2004/2005 without accompanying narrative. In doing so, the Assembly Government accepted that it would be assessing spending plans only on the basis of its analysis of the available management information on programme activities.
- 16** The requirement for full spending plans was reinstated as planned for 2005/2006. The Assembly Government also reviewed its assessment arrangements and introduced new guidelines that set out more clearly the issues which should be examined by Assembly Government and Estyn assessors. However, the assessment process still lacks standards, in terms of the quality of the evidence required to help determine whether core assessment criteria are met. Such standards would help ensure a more consistent approach to assessment, particularly in determining whether LEA evaluation proposals are adequate.
- 17** The Better Schools Fund has also brought new challenges that need to be addressed. In particular, the introduction of the new scheme in 2004/2005 took place against a background of a significant reduction in funding. Although this reduction has not yet been matched by a reduction of similar proportions in the cost of administering the scheme at LEA level, the Assembly Government is undertaking work to refine the planning requirements of LEAs.
- 18** To take account of the reduction in funding, a number of activities were removed from the programme. The Assembly Government advised LEAs that if they wished these activities to continue locally then they would need to meet the associated costs from the Local Government Revenue Settlement, which rose by 3.4 per cent in 2004/2005, although there was no direct transfer of funding from the scheme to the Revenue Support Grant. In the event, LEAs withdrew their support from a number of activities, rather than provide alternative funding.

There remains scope at all levels, including LEAs and schools, to improve the evaluation of activities supported by the Better Schools Fund

- 19** Although the Better Schools Fund represents a relatively small proportion of total spending on education, it is still, nevertheless, significant. Effective evaluation of the Fund (and, before it, GEST) and the activities supported by the Fund is therefore important, to provide the Assembly Government with assurance that funded activities are having their intended effect, and to inform the future design of the programme. It should also help LEAs to ensure that good practice supported by the Better Schools Fund is subsequently embedded into mainstream education provision. The Assembly Government's channelling of resources through democratically accountable local government bodies requires all parts of the delivery chain – the Assembly Government, LEAs and schools – to have a role in monitoring and evaluating the scheme and its impact.
- 20** While there have been some recent improvements, there remains further scope for the Assembly Government to improve its evaluation arrangements. The Assembly Government collects data on outputs and outcomes and has undertaken some evaluation of this data, although this provides only limited evidence of the effectiveness of activities supported by the Fund. The Assembly Government has also commissioned evaluation reports, for example from Estyn, which have provided further evidence of the effectiveness of some activities. However, evaluation coverage has not been systematic and there are areas, such as Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, where there have been limited or no assessments of effectiveness.
- 21** The evaluations of GEST carried out by LEAs and schools were of variable quality and, generally, provided little evidence of the effectiveness of

funded activities in terms of raising standards. However, we identified some examples of good practice.

- 22** The introduction of the Better Schools Fund was accompanied by the requirement for the Assembly Government to evaluate all priority areas within a three year period, and the 2005/2006 circular identified those priority areas that fall due for evaluation before 2006/2007. The minimum standard for the evaluation of an area is a report commissioned from Estyn. LEAs are also required to provide an overview of the evaluation carried out locally and an explanation how evaluation conclusions have been taken into account in annual spending plans. The annual circular does not, however, provide LEAs with practical advice on how evaluations of activities supported by the Better Schools Fund should be conducted.

Recommendations

- i** The introduction of the Better Schools Fund has been accompanied by a reduction in the funds available under the scheme and a proportionately smaller reduction in LEA administrative effort. Individual priority areas within the Fund now have a three year funding limit and should be evaluated within three years of their introduction. In the light of these developments, and given the difficulties experienced in recent years in keeping to an annual planning cycle, and in assessing LEA spending plans and evaluating the effectiveness of funded activities, **the Assembly Government should consider whether a better use of resources might result from planning, funding and managing the programme over a longer cycle, such as three years.**
- ii** Consultation between the Assembly Government, on the one hand, and LEAs and other relevant bodies in the education sector, such as Estyn, on the other, is an important means of identifying priority areas for improvement and the means of



achieving such improvement. While communication has increased with the introduction of the Better Schools Fund, there is scope for further improvement, most notably between those in the Assembly Government responsible for policy matters and LEA officials running the programme locally. **The Assembly Government should devise and publish an annual consultation programme and timetable to help ensure that all relevant parties are consulted at the appropriate time. As well as specifying dates for Better Schools Fund team officials to meet LEA officers, the programme should set out suggested periods for LEA policy leads to liaise with LEA Better Schools Fund managers, in order to further improve the dialogue about finalisation of the circular. The programme should also make it clear that relevant Assembly Government policy leads are expected to participate in consultation meetings on the Better Schools Fund to explain to LEA Better Schools Fund managers the policy thinking behind changes to the programme.**

- iii The Assembly Government's Better Schools Fund team is small and, in recent years, has been heavily reliant on one key member of staff, thereby making the Fund's annual planning cycle prone to slippage because of staff turnover, staff sickness and competing priorities. **The Assembly Government should take steps, such as establishing adequate cover arrangements in advance, to ensure that it is better able to cope with the events that cause slippage.**

- iv The Assembly Government's assessment of LEA spending plans has been uneven across the programme. **The Assembly Government should draw up standards, in terms of the quality of the evidence required to help determine whether core criteria for the assessment of LEA spending plans have been met. In particular, these standards should set out the evidence required to indicate the likely effectiveness of funded activities.**
- v Evaluating the impact of funded activities on standards of teaching and education is important to ensure that Better Schools Fund resources are used effectively. The Assembly Government has introduced a rolling programme of evaluation, and also requires LEAs and schools to carry out their own evaluations of funded activities. To ensure that all aspects of the programme are evaluated to an appropriate standard, **the Assembly Government should develop and issue practical guidance for LEAs, schools and other evaluators on how it expects evaluation to be carried out. This should include reference to the improved measures, including proxy indicators, that the Assembly Government is seeking to develop in order to provide better evidence of the impact of funded activities on standards of teaching and education.**



Part 1: Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) was established to help raise standards in schools, but some aspects of its design and administration were not conducive to the achievement of that objective

GEST provided LEAs with funding to take forward local action to raise standards in schools within a broad strategic framework

- 1.1** The (then) Welsh Office established the GEST programme in 1991/1992. From 2001, the programme supported the Assembly Government's objective to "...drive up standards of teaching and attainment in all our schools, valuing and supporting the teaching profession to achieve this."³ The majority of GEST funding was spent on in-service training, although funds could be used to buy, for example, information technology equipment, where this was relevant to the scheme's objectives.
- 1.2** Each year the scheme provided funds for a range of specified activity areas, such as Literacy and Numeracy, School Leadership and Early Years Learning. These areas reflected the Assembly Government's policy aims and its assessment of where standards needed to improve. The number of activity areas varied from year-to-year, rising to 19 in 2000/2001. In 2000/2001, the Assembly Government, in consultation with the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, carried out a review of the programme and reduced the number of activity areas to 10, in order to demonstrate more clearly the relationship between the activities supported by GEST and the Assembly's strategic priorities for education, and to streamline administration. Most activity areas contained subsidiary priority areas, the number of which also varied over time (Appendix 2).

- 1.3** The Assembly Government set out in an annual GEST circular the overall purpose of the scheme, the definitions of activity areas eligible for funding and the priority areas within them, and the related administrative arrangements. The Circular included details of the funding that was available under each activity area and how LEAs should apply for it.
- 1.4** The Assembly Government provided a grant of 60 per cent of the cost of most eligible activities, with LEAs contributing the balance from their unhypothecated revenue settlements. Funds were distributed on the basis of a formula agreed with local authorities and the WLGA, although some funding was allocated to LEAs on the basis of competitive bids. The Assembly Government provided the money for each financial year in four instalments, paying the final instalment only on receipt of a grant claim certificate from the local authority's auditors that showed whether the matched funding had been provided by the LEAs and the requirements set out in the GEST circular had been met. The total funds allocated to GEST and its successor, the Better Schools Fund, are set out in Figure 1.

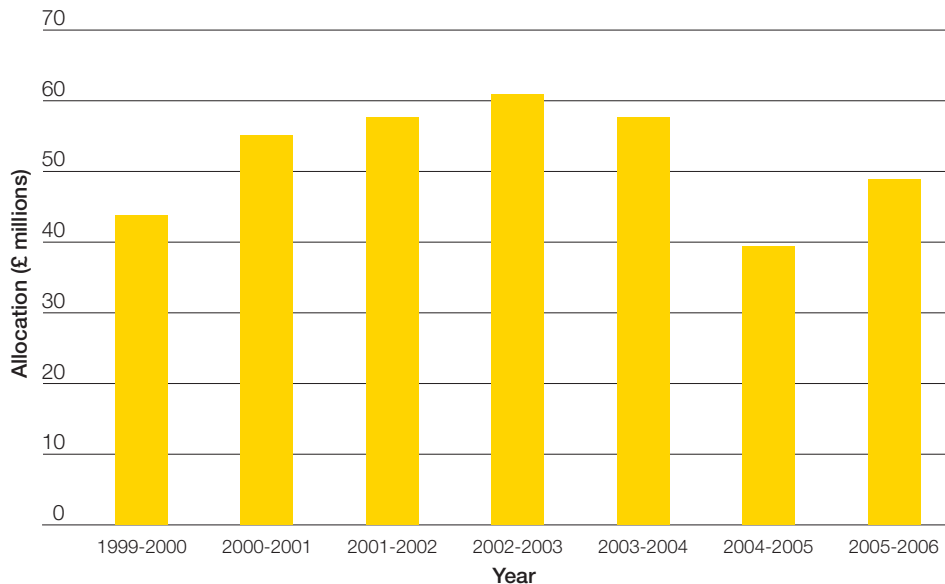
GEST represented a significant element of the Assembly Government's grant support aimed at influencing school improvement

- 1.5** Although GEST funds amounted to less than two per cent of the total schools budget in Wales, the programme was a significant source of funding for the training and development of teachers and teaching assistants, and for other means of improving standards. Most LEAs and schools in

³ *The Learning Country*, August 2001



Figure 1: GEST allocations for 1999/2000 to 2003/2004 and Better Schools Fund allocations for 2004/2005 and 2005/2006



Note: Allocations include Assembly Government and LEA funding

Source: GEST circulars

our survey sample told us that GEST was an important means of enabling them to improve standards.

1.6 The Assembly Government provided a range of other targeted grants for LEAs, including Additional Revenue for Schools⁴ (£35.5 million in 2003/2004) and Early Years (£16 million in 2003/2004). It also provided funding for the individual professional development of teachers, through the General Teaching Council's Continuing Professional Development Fund (£5 million in 2003/2004). These funds were intended to help raise standards in different ways. For example, the purpose of the General Teaching Council's Continuing Professional Development Fund is to address the individual professional needs of teachers.

GEST was developed as a partnership between the Assembly Government and LEAs

1.7 In broad terms, GEST provided ring-fenced funds for LEAs to spend on training, support and development activities for teachers and teaching assistants, to enable them to improve educational outcomes. The requirement that LEAs provided matched funding of 40 per cent of the cost of most activities funded by GEST was intended to encourage their commitment to the activities being supported. LEA input was monitored through the certification of LEAs' grant claims by auditors appointed by the Audit Commission⁵, giving the Assembly Government assurance that LEAs had provided their 40 per cent share of funding and had met other specified requirements before being able to claim their final instalment of GEST funding.

⁴ Additional Revenue for Schools has been granted for a number of specific purposes, including reductions in junior class sizes, support for low performing schools, support for small and rural schools, and improvements at Key Stage 3.

⁵ On 1 April 2005, the functions and staff of the Audit Commission in Wales were absorbed into the newly created Wales Audit Office.

- 1.8** The Assembly Government's approach was intended to allow LEAs to pursue the achievement of national objectives while taking account of variations in local needs and circumstances. GEST funding could also be used, along with other sources of funding, to support the implementation of aspects of LEAs' Education Strategic Plans where this was consistent with the aims and objectives of GEST.
- 1.9** The annual GEST circular set out the aims and objectives underpinning each activity and priority area and provided guidance on eligible expenditure. Some activity areas, such as the National Grid for Learning, had specific targets that LEAs were expected to achieve. Generally, however, the programme allowed LEAs to plan their activities within broad parameters, and targets were agreed between the Assembly Government and individual authorities on the basis of information provided in LEA spending plans, which included performance measures for each activity area. In total there were some 70 such measures in 2003/2004.

Some aspects of the design and administration of GEST were not conducive to the achievement of its objectives

LEAs came to regard GEST as a source of recurrent funding rather than a specific grant for activities to raise standards

- 1.10** From its launch in 1991, GEST was developed as a 'portfolio' grant scheme through which funding for a wide range of initiatives could be channelled. This enabled the administration of the scheme to be streamlined and helped keep to a minimum the number of individual grant schemes that LEAs had to administer.
- 1.11** LEAs and schools often treated GEST as a source of recurrent funding, rather than an annual specific grant for activities to raise standards, and the

LEAs and schools we surveyed told us that they had come to rely on GEST to fund ongoing activities. The programme had been running for several years and, despite changes from year to year in some areas, it had continued to support broadly the same range and type of activities. Even when time limits for initiatives had been signalled, funding sometimes continued to be provided beyond those limits at the request of LEAs. For example, the Music Development Fund was included in GEST in 1999 for three years, but still featured in 2004/2005.

Not all relevant parties in the education sector considered that they were sufficiently consulted on GEST

- 1.12** The Assembly Government consulted relevant parties in the education sector to identify, and obtain, evidence to inform its strategic education priorities. In addition, policy teams within the Assembly Government consulted with their LEA policy counterparts in a variety of ways on the activity and priority areas to be included in GEST. Consultation on GEST also included discussions with standing advisory groups, which had Estyn and Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) representation, and meetings with LEA subject groups, such as for Welsh. In some cases, the Assembly Government also sought advice on an ad hoc basis during development of the annual GEST circular.
- 1.13** However, formal consultation on the development of the programme took the form of an annual meeting between the Assembly Government and LEAs, to which Estyn, ACCAC, the WLGA and others were invited. Discussions at this meeting focused largely on the detailed text of the draft Circular, which was usually issued a month in advance. Both Estyn and ACCAC told us that they found the extent of consultation on the development of GEST each year rather limited.



1.14 Local Education Authority representatives at the formal annual consultation meeting tended to be those with responsibility for running GEST in their own authorities, rather than the experts in particular policy areas. Similarly, the Assembly Government's policy leads tended not to accompany the GEST team. Consequently, while the draft Circular would reflect the results of liaison between Assembly Government policy leads and their LEA counterparts, the communication of policy changes to LEA officers responsible for the local management of the programme was somewhat disjointed. This was reflected in the comments of some LEAs officers who told us that consultation meetings would have been of more value if they had been held in advance of the draft Circular being issued.

1.15 Consultation with LEAs improved in 2002/2003 when the Assembly Government's GEST team undertook a series of additional one-to-one and small group meetings with all LEAs in Wales to discuss the future development of the programme. The team also engaged closely with LEA

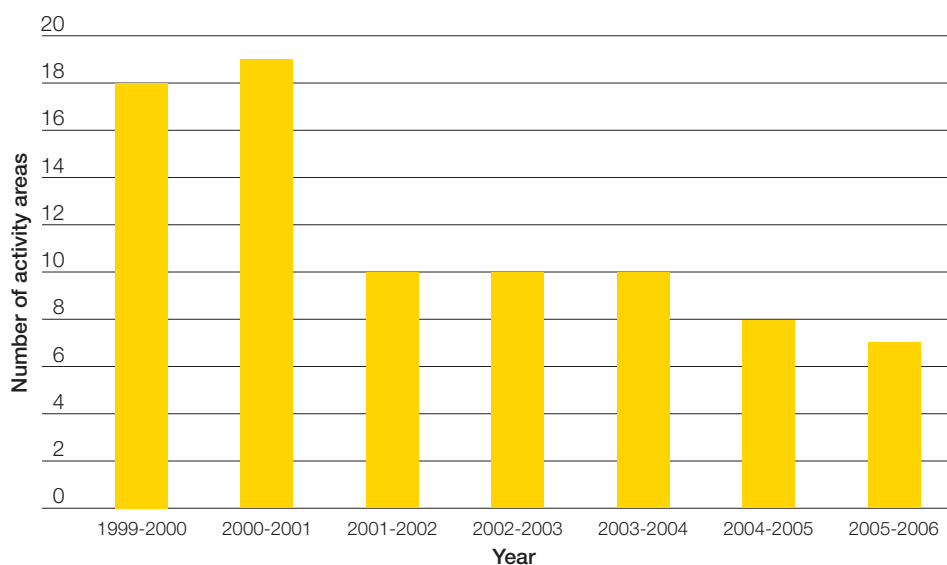
representatives and the WLGA during the review of the GEST allocation formula in 2001/2002 and 2002/2003.

LEAs were required to manage year on year changes in priorities

1.16 Changes to the grant scheme needed to be made from time to time to reflect changing educational priorities. As the Assembly Government directed support for a growing number of initiatives through GEST, such as implementing commitments in *The BEST for Teaching and Learning in Wales* (green paper, Cm 4150, 1999), the number of activity areas increased and administration of the programme became more complex (Figure 2 and Appendix 2).

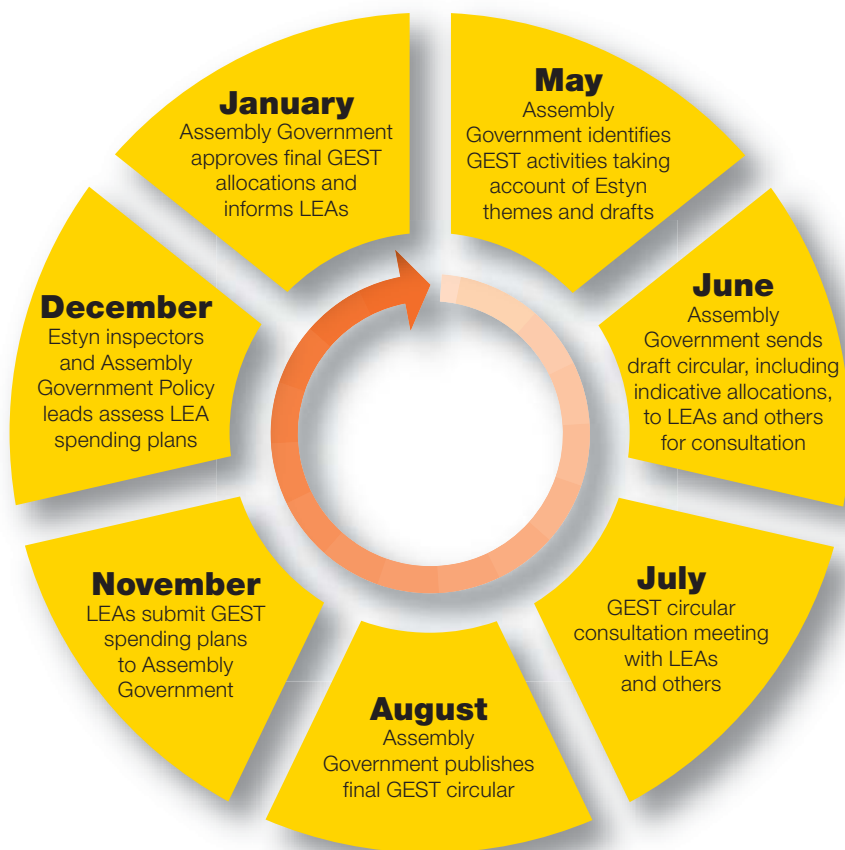
1.17 In 2000/2001 the Assembly Government, in consultation with the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, reviewed the structure of the programme and subsequently reduced the number of activity areas from 19 to 10, with the intention that each activity area linked clearly to strategic Assembly Government priorities. It also streamlined the rules under which LEAs could move expenditure between activity areas. The

Figure 2: The number of activity areas since 1999



Source: GEST and Better Schools Fund circulars

Figure 3: planned Annual GEST cycle



Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of GEST circulars

number of priority areas remained high, however, and it took some time for the relationship between these and the new activity areas to bed in. The LEAs we visited told us that these changes made it difficult for them to plan with any degree of certainty, particularly as they often needed to plan on the basis of the previous year's circular until the one for the current year became available.

There were often delays in the GEST planning cycle

1.18 Each year, the Assembly Government set out in its GEST circular an indicative allocation for each LEA under each activity area. In response, LEAs prepared and submitted plans setting out what they intended to do with their allocations.

1.19 The Assembly Government intended the GEST cycle to begin in May each year, with LEAs being notified of their indicative allocations in June. This was some nine months in advance of the financial year for which allocations would be made and 14 months in advance of the school year in which most expenditure would take place. The GEST team worked with policy leads to translate emerging policy requirements into eligible activity and priority areas for the new GEST circular, which was then sent to LEAs and others for consultation. The preparation of the draft circular would also take account of Estyn's annual reports, which identified in broad terms where there was a need for improvement in schools. Following consultation with LEAs, and after including any agreed



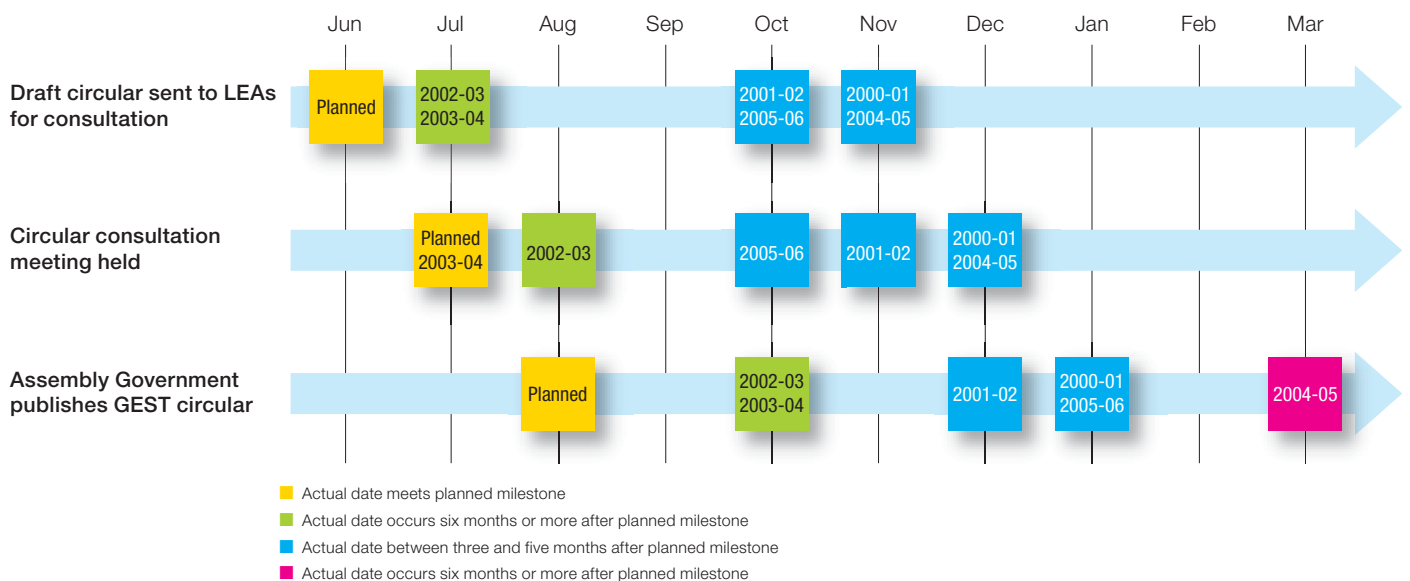
changes, the Assembly Government issued the final Circular and formally invited LEAs to submit spending plans. Policy leads within the Department for Training and Education then assessed each LEA's spending plan, with advice from Estyn. When this process was completed, the GEST team would notify LEAs of their confirmed funding allocations (Figure 3).

1.20 The Assembly Government aimed to publish the final GEST circular in August each year, with LEA spending plans due in November, in time for the Assembly Government to make allocations to LEAs the following January, alongside finalisation of the education budget and confirmation of the Revenue Support Grant. This allowed time for LEAs to notify schools of their delegated allocations before the start of the financial year and some eight months ahead of the academic year for which schools would mainly be using the grant. The differences between the financial and academic

years meant that schools needed to call on some of the new grant in order to complete (in the summer term) some of the training planned from the previous financial year. However, factors, such as external examinations, inhibit development activities during the summer term, and the bulk of GEST expenditure tended to be incurred in the first two terms of the academic year.

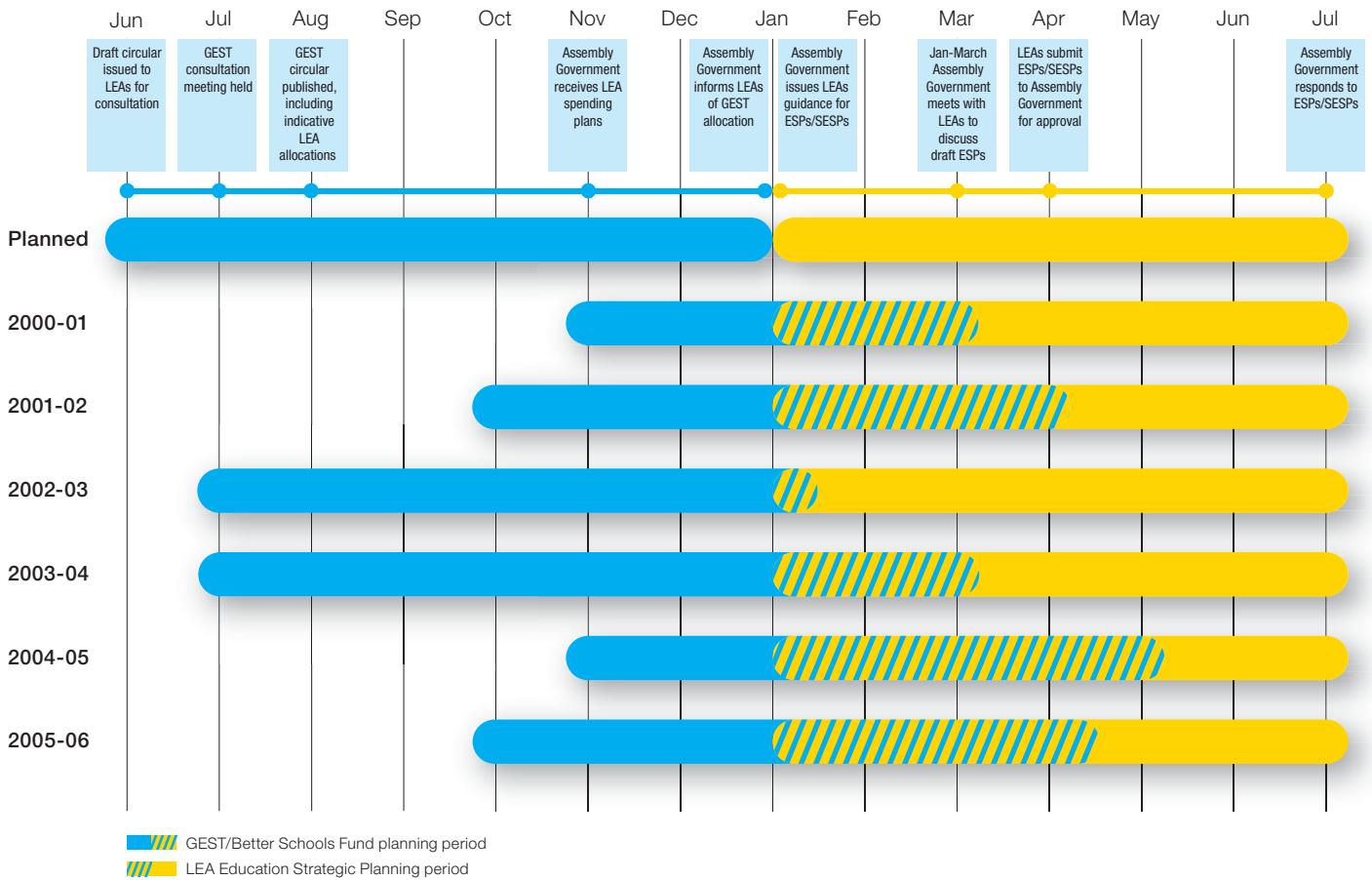
1.21 During the period 2001/2002 to 2005/2006, the Assembly Government did not meet its key milestones in the GEST cycle (Figure 4). Delays occurred for two main reasons. First, the GEST team was small and heavily reliant on one key member of staff. Therefore, it was vulnerable to staff sickness, staff turnover and competing priorities. Second, some policy decisions affecting the GEST circular often required extensive consultation within the Assembly Government's Department for Training and Education, which could be time consuming.

Figure 4: Assembly Government achievement of planning milestones 2001/2002 to 2005/2006



Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of slippages in the GEST timetable

Figure 5: Comparison of the GEST/Better Schools Fund cycle and the LEA Education Strategic Planning cycle



Source: Wales Audit Office analysis of GEST and Better Schools Fund cycle since 2000/2001

1.22 In each of these years, the time available for consultation and for planning by LEAs and schools was compressed. Half of the LEAs and a third of the schools we surveyed considered that they had insufficient time to plan effectively as a result of such delays. Half of the LEAs also said that they had difficulties in finding matched funding when they received late notification of their allocations from the Assembly Government. Some said that these difficulties intensified during years when their allocations had increased. However, the Assembly Government publishes its draft budget, including the GEST baseline, well in advance of the new financial year, and considers that this should have signalled to LEAs any major changes

to the scheme. Also, in the year of the largest slippage, 2004/2005, the Circular to LEAs was published six months in advance of the academic year to which the bulk of the funding related, although this was only one month in advance of the start of the first term covered by the financial year.

1.23 Slippage against the GEST planning timetable also meant that LEAs had some difficulty providing GEST data to inform Education Strategic Plans (Figure 5). In these plans, LEAs set out how they will develop and improve their schools over the subsequent three academic years. The plans cover all aspects of development, though at a strategic rather than operational level, and include



specific measures to improve standards. The plans are updated annually as Supplementary Education Strategic Plans, and are submitted to the Assembly Government for approval in the March or April before each academic year.

1.24 Estyn told us that uncertainty in the timing of the publication of the Circular made it difficult to set aside time for its inspectors to examine LEAs' GEST spending plans, a service Estyn provided to inform the Assembly Government's own assessments. Also, while it would have a clear view of overall priorities, Estyn considered that it would have been better informed by earlier sight of LEAs' spending plans in preparing for its own inspection work.

Assessments of LEAs' GEST spending plans lacked consistency

1.25 As part of the annual GEST cycle, the Assembly Government assessed and approved LEAs' spending plans prior to the final allocation of grant. The range of activities covered by the programme meant that plans were assessed by up to 20 individual Assembly Government officials – each of whom had responsibility for specific policy areas supported by the scheme – and by Estyn district inspectors. There were significant challenges in ensuring that assessments were completed consistently, and took full account of the analysis of management information on activities and the likely effectiveness of spending proposals.

1.26 In assessing spending plans, the aim of the Assembly Government was to bring all LEAs' plans up to an acceptable level, rather than to reject weak bids and withhold funding from schools. During the assessment process, policy leads were expected to follow up matters of concern with the LEAs and, where appropriate, seek clarification of, or amendment to, the plans. In some years, where issues could not be resolved in a timely manner, the Assembly Government issued conditional approvals and required LEAs to

provide information and improvements in plans before paying any grant. Given that GEST funds were allocated to LEAs on the basis of a formula, and the partner relationship between the Assembly Government and LEAs, this approach was reasonable, but it lacked:

- a** standards, in terms of the quality of the evidence required to help determine whether assessment criteria were met and ensure a consistent approach across activity areas;
- b** systematic analysis of data on past performance and future targets. While performance measures were incorporated into GEST spending plans following an Assembly Government internal audit review of GEST in 1999, year on year variations in activity and priority areas made it difficult to analyse trends;
- c** clarity in the role of Estyn in assessing spending plans, to ensure that their advice informed policy leads of the likely effectiveness of proposals.

1.27 Before being assessed by the Assembly Government, LEAs' spending plans were examined by Estyn district inspectors, who would draw on their professional knowledge of a LEA, and its performance, as a whole. Inspectors would consider, among other things, whether the LEA would be able to deliver its proposals, whether the proposals would be likely to improve standards in line with GEST's objectives, whether good account had been taken of Estyn findings and whether robust evaluation procedures had been proposed.

1.28 Policy teams from the Assembly Government's Department for Training and Education then assessed LEAs' spending plans on an activity area by activity area basis. They considered whether the proposals met the criteria set out in the GEST circular, particularly whether planned spending would support eligible activities. The policy teams would also consider whether targets

for activities – usually output targets, such as the number of teachers trained, but sometimes indicators of pupil attainment – were reasonable, usually by comparing the targets with the forecast outturns of previous years.

1.29 We interviewed policy leads for six GEST activity areas and found that all of them analysed at a high level the management information that tracked the progress of activities, but they did not adopt a consistent approach, and, in all cases, their analysis could have been more robust and comprehensive. For example, policy leads were able to point to improvements in some key high level indicators, such as GCSE results, but they did not seek to establish whether, or the extent to which, GEST funded activities had contributed to the improvements in outcomes.

1.30 In assessing plans, policy leads would draw on Estyn's surveys and thematic reports where these were relevant to their activity areas. They would also look for evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed activities in the narrative of LEAs' spending plans. LEAs were required to provide information on their own local evaluations in their spending plans, but they were not required to provide copies of local evaluation reports. While usually allowed four to eight weeks to assess spending plans, several policy leads told us that other pressures meant that they had limited opportunity to look at LEAs' track records or the achievability of their proposals.

1.31 Policy leads also used the pre-assessments of LEA spending plans provided by Estyn, but in different ways. Some referred to them consistently, pursuing with the LEA concerned any indications of weakness given by the Estyn pre-assessment, whereas others would refer to the Estyn pre-assessment only if their own assessment raised issues of concern. In other cases, there was some overlap in the assessments carried out by policy

leads and Estyn inspectors, with both sets of assessments sometimes commenting on the same issues.

1.32 The different approaches to assessment of LEA spending plans were highlighted in an Assembly Government internal audit report originally issued in 1998. The report recommended that the GEST team draw up a methodology for the assessment of spending plans, including a requirement for lead policy divisions to draw up specific selection criteria appropriate to their areas of responsibility, which they should use when assessing the bids. This recommendation was implemented through the 2000-01 Circular (published November 1999) with updated guidance issued in 2002 following the subsequent restructuring of the programme. The guidance did not, however, include standards on the quality of evidence required to help determine whether assessment criteria were met.

LEAs and schools moved funds within the scheme to better reflect local priorities, but late notifications and retrospective requests for approval made it more difficult for the Assembly Government to review how funds were being spent

1.33 Local assessments of priorities inevitably did not always match those of the Assembly Government, as set out in the annual GEST circular and reflected in LEA and school allocations. Accordingly, under the partnership approach adopted for GEST, LEAs had considerable flexibility to move funds between different parts of the scheme after spending plans had been approved. This enabled them to take account of local priorities, within the broad framework set out in the programme, and to respond to in-year pressures.

1.34 While a majority of LEAs (14 out of 22) and two thirds of schools surveyed said that GEST priorities broadly aligned with their assessments of local



needs, LEAs made use of the flexibility within the scheme to move small proportions of their allocations. In 2003/2004 the proportion of total funds moved was four per cent, but sometimes some authorities moved significant proportions, up to 15 per cent of their allocations. Most movements of funds appear to have taken place towards the end of the financial year.

1.35 For the movement of funds between some activity areas, LEAs were required to obtain the prior approval of the Assembly Government. However,

there were several occasions when LEAs sought approval retrospectively, after the movement had already taken place. Three of the 22 LEAs sought retrospective approval to move funds in each of 2001/2002 and 2002/2003. The late notification of, and retrospective requests for, approval to move funds within GEST made it difficult for the Assembly Government to intervene to ensure the delivery of approved spending plans was not compromised.



Part 2: The Better Schools Fund overcomes some of the shortcomings of GEST but there is scope for further improvement

The Better Schools Fund has brought some improvements in administration

The administration of the scheme has become more streamlined and less costly

- 2.1** In 2004, following an internal review, the Assembly Government introduced the Better Schools Fund to replace GEST. The Better Schools Fund was intended to focus on innovation and support for new initiatives, rather than providing ongoing support for established education provision. The changes associated with the Better Schools Fund were phased in, starting in the 2004/2005 transitional year.
- 2.2** In the years preceding the introduction of the Better Schools Fund, the Assembly Government had implemented improvements in the management of GEST, including the reorganisation of the programme to demonstrate the link with Assembly strategic priorities and a review of the allocation formulae to ensure that resources were more effectively targeted. It also introduced administrative changes, such as the issue of electronic grant claim forms and the submission of LEA spending plans by e-mail. In making the transition from GEST to the Better Schools Fund in 2004/2005, the Assembly Government has further improved the administration of the scheme, such as by requiring LEAs to submit information on performance measures electronically in a common spreadsheet format. Our survey of LEAs showed that the resources they used to plan and administer the scheme in 2004/2005 amounted to an average of 22 staff days, a 15 per cent reduction compared with the previous year.

- 2.3** Before 2005/2006, the annual circular gave policy leads in the Assembly Government's Department for Training and Education as the first point of contact for their activity areas. During our field visits, LEAs told us that this had tended to lead to queries being redirected around the Department, rather than being answered directly. For 2005/2006, all queries from LEAs relating to the Better Schools Fund circular are being routed through the Department's Better Schools Fund team, to enable them to be dealt with more quickly and consistently.

- 2.4** For 2005/2006, only activities that lend themselves to the Better Schools Fund principle of fixed term support – funding for three years, and only for projects that have clear exit strategies – remain within the scheme. Consequently, it no longer includes activities such as the Music Development Fund, which requires recurrent funding for tuition. Such changes are in accordance with the Assembly Grant Protocol, agreed in 2004 between the Welsh Assembly Government and the WLGA. The Protocol is intended to keep the number, value and duration of hypothecated grants to a minimum. It also promotes certainty about the amount and timing of funding that local authorities can expect to receive through such grants and requires clearly stated exit strategies.

Stricter rules governing the movement of funds between activity areas should help the Assembly Government to monitor better the use of funds

- 2.5** When the Assembly Government reduced the total funding available through the scheme by one third for 2004/2005, it permitted the open movement of funds between most activity areas.



It also removed the formal requirement for LEAs to delegate at least 50 per cent of their allocations to schools, replacing this with a requirement to agree delegation levels locally. These were transitional arrangements for 2004/2005 only, to help LEAs manage the transition from a higher allocation to a lower one, and to adapt to the new funding arrangements for the Better Schools Fund, which were implemented in full from 2005/2006 onwards. The arrangements for 2004/2005 did, however, restrict the Assembly Government's ability to intervene to ensure that the movement of funds did not compromise the delivery of approved spending plans.

2.6 In line with changes announced with the introduction of the Better Schools Fund, for 2005/2006 onwards the Assembly Government has introduced tighter restrictions on the movement of funds between activity areas. LEAs retain considerable flexibility to move funds across the programme, but proposals, including the reasons for doing so, must now be set out in their annual spending plans. LEAs then have a period in which to agree any changes with schools and notify these to the Assembly Government's Better Schools Fund team. The 2005/2006 circular stated that LEAs may be required to prepare an amended spending plan for approval prior to any transfer of funds, if it appears that proposed movements will significantly compromise the delivery of approved plans. The 2005/2006 circular also stressed that the movement of funds, for any purpose, would not be allowed after 31 July 2005. These measures should help the Assembly Government to monitor better the use of funds to ensure the delivery of agreed activities and objectives.

Reduced funding has led schools to re-consider the ways supported activities are carried out

2.7 The transition from GEST to the Better Schools Fund has been accompanied by a reduction in overall funding (Figure 2) and a refocusing on measures that support innovation and new initiatives. This has led many schools to devise means of enabling the available funding to benefit the maximum number of teachers. Our focus group of teachers gave us the following examples:

- a** trainers visiting schools to train a larger group of teachers at the same time, rather than individuals attending separate courses;
- b** teachers who have attended courses briefing colleagues on what they have learned on their return to the workplace; and
- c** schools working together in consortia, to pool resources and reduce overheads (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Consortium planning within Caerphilly LEA

The Newbridge/Cross Keys consortium consists of Cross Keys College, Newbridge Comprehensive School and seven feeder primary schools, all located in Caerphilly County Borough.

In April 2004, Caerphilly LEA warned its schools about forthcoming cuts to funding from a range of sources, including the Better Schools Fund, the General Teaching Council for Wales and Education Business Partners. In response, the heads of the schools formed a consortium and produced a strategic plan setting out their priorities for training and other activities for raising standards over the following 18 months. They then translated this into an operational plan, which identified the initiatives that would receive support from their pooled funds. The pool is funded by a levy of £150 per teacher, taken from the Better Schools Fund allocation of each school in the consortium, giving a total fund of £17,500.

continued...

Rather than nine schools making separate arrangements for training courses, a single school makes arrangements on behalf of all of them, thereby reducing the administrative burden. The purchase of training and other support through the consortium also places the schools in a better position to negotiate discounts, and allows issues that cross primary/secondary school boundaries, such as the transition from primary to secondary school, to be addressed more coherently.

Source: Head teacher of Abercarn Primary School

There are old and new challenges to be tackled

Consultation has increased but there is scope for further engagement between LEAs and policy leads

2.8 Consultation with LEAs, Estyn and professional bodies is necessary to help ensure that the Better Schools Fund supports activities in areas where improvement is needed. In contrast to the single meeting for all stakeholders on the circular for 2004/2005, communication between the Assembly Government and LEAs in preparation for the issue of the circular for 2005/2006 involved three regional meetings, followed by the main annual meeting and a further opportunity to comment in writing. The Better Schools Fund team has also introduced arrangements whereby the team has visited each LEA in turn to give feedback on spending plans and discuss the future development of the Fund. The LEAs we interviewed welcomed this development.

2.9 The Assembly Government's Better Schools Fund team continues to invite Estyn, ACCAC, the WLGA and the General Teaching Council for Wales to an annual consultation meeting and has initiated meetings to discuss the scheme's priorities and administration with Estyn and the General Teaching Council Wales. It has also discussed with Estyn the outcomes of Estyn

district inspector assessments of bids from the Fund and the programme of evaluation. This has helped Estyn to better match the work programmes of its district inspectors to the time when LEA spending plans are available for examination.

2.10 While consultation has improved in terms of increased contact between the Assembly Government and LEAs, LEAs told us during our visits and in our survey that they wanted to know more about the thinking behind policy decisions. The Assembly Government agrees that LEA officials who manage the Better Schools Fund in their authorities would benefit from a better understanding of overarching policy considerations that affect the management of the programme, and has discussed with the WLGA how this might be addressed, but considers that much of this is a matter of internal LEA communication. However, the Assembly Government also accepts that increased participation in consultation meetings with LEAs by the relevant Assembly Government policy leads would help to improve communication of the thinking behind policy decisions that result in changes to funded activities and priorities.

Slippage against the planning cycle continued in the first two years of the Better Schools Fund

2.11 The planning cycle for the Better Schools Fund is the same as for GEST, and there were significant slippages against the timetable for 2004/2005 and 2005/2006 (Figure 5). These slippages delayed the planning of activities supported by the Fund. As at January 2006, however, planning for 2006/2007 was running to time.

2.12 Slippage was particularly acute for the 2004/2005 transitional year, when the Assembly Government did not formally consult on the Circular until December 2003, some six months later than planned. The slippage was largely a consequence of the need to develop the Circular to reflect the transition from GEST to the Better Schools Fund and to take account of a significantly reduced



baseline, but staff sickness in the Better Schools Fund team also contributed. Within the much curtailed period, Assembly Government officials not only had to inform the LEAs and other key players of changes in the activity areas, but also the transition from GEST to the Better Schools Fund and the reduced funding available under the new arrangements. As a consequence, there was little time available for LEAs and schools to make changes to their plans.

2.13 Slippage from the 2004/2005 planning round had a knock on effect on the planning timetable for 2005/2006, which was also affected by extended discussions with, and information gathering from, LEAs on financing the Induction and Early Professional Development activity area. The Assembly Government subsequently decided to remove the Induction and Early Professional Development activity area from the Better Schools Fund, and to ask the General Teaching Council for Wales to manage this as a central grant programme.

2.14 The Assembly Government began planning for the 2006/2007 Better Schools Fund a month ahead of schedule. As at January 2006, it had met all the planning milestones, while increasing consultation with LEAs and other relevant parties, and making other improvements to the management of the programme. It has provided LEA spending plans to Estyn promptly and in an electronic form, so that Estyn district inspectors have been able to examine bids at the time agreed in their work programme. The Assembly Government considers that it is on target to confirm final allocations in January 2006.

The Assembly Government's assessments of LEAs' spending plans could be further improved

2.15 The Assembly Government acknowledged the difficulties faced by LEAs as a result of the late issue of the circular for 2004/2005 by simplifying spending plan requirements and relaxing the rules

for delegating funds to schools. It also extended the deadline for the submission of LEA spending plans to March 2004, and required LEAs to provide information on targets and their forecast outturns for the previous year only, without an accompanying text to explain their plans. In doing so, the Assembly Government accepted that they would be assessing bids only on the basis of its analysis of management information on activities. Assembly Government policy leads reviewed the reasonableness of this information, and sought clarification or amendment in respect of areas of concern, as they had done in previous years.

2.16 As the Assembly Government had accepted that, for 2004/2005 only, it would only be assessing bids on the basis of its analysis of management information, it did not engage Estyn district inspectors to provide pre-assessments. This made it more difficult to assess the likely effectiveness of proposed activities.

2.17 To help address the limitations of its assessments of LEAs' spending plans for 2004/2005, the Assembly Government's Better Schools Fund team undertook a range of quantitative analyses of LEA management information and shared these with policy leads in order to highlight any underlying issues and trends. These analyses were facilitated by the central collation of LEA management information by the Better Schools Fund team, which also helped with the identification and pursuit of missing information. The Better Schools Fund team also made arrangements to discuss in year progress with LEAs.

2.18 The Assembly Government reinstated full spending plans for 2005/2006, as intended, together with further improvements. The new arrangements included a clearer distinction between the issues to be considered by Assembly Government policy leads on the one hand and Estyn inspectors on the other. The Better Schools Fund team also produced guidance for assessors

setting out the key questions that they should consider, including the adequacy of evaluation. However, the guidance did not include standards, in terms of the quality of information required to help determine whether assessment criteria are met, such as examples of what would constitute adequate evaluation arrangements. Nevertheless, the Better Schools Fund team did ask policy leads to identify examples of good evaluation practice in LEA plans, which it subsequently shared with all LEAs.

The reduction in programme funding was not matched by a similar reduction in LEA administrative effort, although education planning requirements are subject to further development

2.19 With the introduction of the Better Schools Fund, the Assembly Government reduced the funding available under the scheme by 31 per cent, from £57.7 million in 2003/2004 to £39.6 million in 2004/2005. Information provided by LEAs to the Assembly Government indicated a reduction in administration costs of 22 per cent in 2004/2005, although there were substantial variations between LEAs. Our survey of LEAs indicated that, over the same period, the time taken by them to plan and administer the scheme had reduced by only 15 per cent. Therefore, the reduction in programme funding was not matched by a reduction of similar proportions in administrative effort.

2.20 Regardless of its size, to be effective, a targeted grant support scheme, such as the Better Schools Fund, needs certain administrative safeguards. However, LEAs in our survey expressed concern that, despite some streamlining, the Better Schools Fund application and approval process remained time consuming. Schools expressed similar concerns through our survey and focus group of head teachers and deputy head teachers, although it should be noted that LEAs, rather than the Assembly Government, determine what plans and reports are required from schools. Nevertheless,

much of the information that the Assembly Government requires of LEAs must be collected from schools.

2.21 Some LEAs have questioned why Better Schools Fund spending plans need to be submitted at all, on the grounds that the plans repeat much of the material contained in the Education Strategic Plans that LEAs are also required to submit to the Assembly Government for approval. The Assembly Government is carrying out a review of all local planning activity in Wales, aimed at streamlining and simplifying the planning of local government improvement activities, with implementation to be phased in over the next few years. As a result, the Assembly Government is introducing a requirement for each LEA to produce a single education plan for 2006-2008, to be pitched at a higher, more strategic, level than has been the material contained in authorities' current education strategic plans. From 2008, the Assembly Government will require authorities to have a Children and Young People's Plan covering all services including education. However, the Assembly Government expects that its planning requirements for the Better Schools Fund, as a targeted grant scheme, will be unaffected by these changes.

2.22 While further streamlining of planning requirements should enable money to be redirected from administration to activities that improve standards, there remains a need for sufficient safeguards to ensure that Better Schools Fund money, as a targeted grant for specific activities, is spent on the purposes intended. Furthermore, high level plans alone will not provide an adequate basis for assessing the specific impact of expenditure on new initiatives. Therefore, the Assembly Government will continue to need spending plans in respect of new initiatives to be supported by the Better Schools Fund. However, if such initiatives are only to be supported for a fixed three year period, unless there are particular reasons for continuing



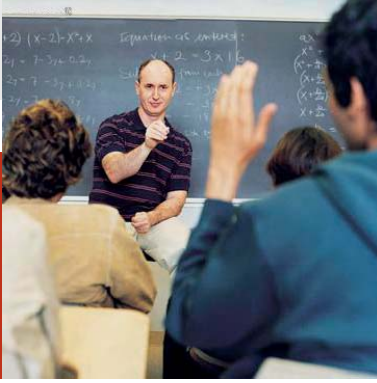
funding, the Assembly Government should consider whether three year, rather than annual, spending plans might be more appropriate.

As the financial support available under the Better Schools Fund has reduced, some activities have ceased

2.23 The introduction of the Better Schools Fund in 2004/2005 was accompanied by a reduction of £18.1 million in funding, and some activities were removed from the new programme to take account of this. The Assembly Government advised LEAs that if they wished these activities to continue locally then they would need to meet the associated

costs from their revenue settlements, which rose by £110 million (3.4 per cent) in the same year. The Assembly Government did not, however, provide a direct transfer of funds from the Better Schools Fund to authorities' revenue settlements, and allocations from revenue settlements depend on the spending priorities and decisions of local authorities, rather than the Assembly Government.

2.24 In the event, LEAs withdrew support from a number of activities rather than providing alternative funding. All 22 LEAs and three quarters of the schools surveyed said that some activities had ceased following the reduction in funding available from the Better Schools Fund.



Part 3: There remains scope at all levels to improve the evaluation of activities supported by the Better Schools Fund

3.1 Effective evaluation of the Better Schools Fund (and, before it, GEST) and the activities supported by the Fund is important. It helps to ensure, and provides the Assembly Government with assurance that, funded activities are having their intended effect, and should inform the future design of the programme. It should also help LEAs to ensure that good practice supported by the Better Schools Fund is subsequently embedded into mainstream education provision. The Assembly Government's channelling of resources through democratically accountable local government bodies requires all parts of the delivery chain – the Assembly Government, LEAs and schools – to have a role in monitoring and evaluating the scheme and its impact.

While recent improvements have been made, there is scope for the Assembly Government to further improve its arrangements for evaluating the Fund

Recognising that there have been weaknesses, the Assembly Government is developing a rolling programme of evaluation

3.2 In 2001, the Assembly Government's internal audit recommended that the Assembly Government's monitoring and evaluation of GEST should be strengthened. And in 2003, the Assembly Government's own review concluded that it was difficult to identify the positive impact of GEST and

that there remained a need to improve monitoring and evaluation, to make better use of Estyn evidence and to develop a clear evaluation trail. The review also concluded that the scheme's management information requirements had been complex and, generally, had not helped monitoring and evaluation. Recommendations from this review led to the introduction of the Better Schools Fund to replace GEST in 2004/2005 and an increased focus on evaluation.

3.3 Most Assembly Government policy leads that we interviewed indicated that their assessments of trends in performance were informed by the findings of Estyn annual reports and reports related to specific activity areas. Estyn's reports indicate that in some areas GEST had a beneficial effect on standards in schools⁶. In particular, the reports on the impact of GEST on school behaviour and attendance,⁷ and literacy and numeracy,⁸ indicated a direct relationship between activities funded by GEST and improving school standards. Estyn reports have also recorded the beneficial impact of GEST-funded courses for groups such as specialist teachers and classroom assistants, and of LEA courses to make non-Welsh speaking primary school teachers competent in learning and teaching the language at primary school level. On the other hand, Estyn's evaluation of Wales Youth Access Initiative projects in 2002 found that, because of inadequate LEA and school evaluation arrangements, it was unclear how the GEST funding that had

⁶ Estyn has not yet produced a report relating specifically to the Better Schools Fund, but, as the activity areas of the Fund are largely continuations of those of GEST, Estyn's reports on GEST continue to be relevant.

⁷ Estyn, *Evaluation of the impact of the GEST programme on school attendance and behaviour*, 2003

⁸ Estyn, *The role of LEAs in raising standards in literacy*, 2000



been delegated to schools had enhanced the dissemination of good practice or been used to initiate real change in schools⁹.

3.4 Estyn has not evaluated and reported on all activities funded by GEST and the Better Schools Fund, as systematic coverage is not part of Estyn's remit. Activities with limited or no assessment of effectiveness by Estyn include some in the school curriculum activity area, such as Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship.

3.5 The Better Schools Fund includes a three year funding limit for individual priority areas, the requirement for an exit strategy for all new activity and priority areas, and a requirement for formal evaluation to be undertaken on all priority areas within three years of their inclusion in the programme. Accordingly, beginning in 2005/2006, the Assembly Government has developed a rolling programme of evaluation of all activity and priority areas supported by the Fund, and the circular for 2006/2007 sets out the priority areas that fall due for evaluation during 2006/2007. However, there are no prescribed arrangements for how evaluation should be carried out, although the recommended minimum requirement is a report commissioned from Estyn. The Assembly Government expects its policy leads to consider alternative arrangements when Estyn are unable to take forward this work, or when it would be more appropriate to adopt a different approach.

The Assembly Government collects data on outputs and some outcomes, but its analysis of the data provides insufficient evidence of the impact of funded activities

3.6 The most recent annual circular issued by the Assembly Government requires LEAs to report some 50 Performance Indicators¹⁰. The majority of these are quantitative output measures, such as

the number of participants receiving training in a particular area. Most of the Assembly Government policy leads that we interviewed examined such performance indicators and, given their knowledge of the capacity and needs of each authority, considered whether the indicators were at the level expected. While such consideration provides some assurance that the LEAs are pursuing the activities intended, as most measures simply track outputs rather than outcomes, it does not itself provide evidence of causal links between funded activities and improvements in standards.

3.7 In some activity areas, such as pupil support, policy leads also examine Performance Indicators intended to measure outcomes – for example the percentage of year 11 ethnic minority pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. And one policy lead we interviewed had undertaken some quantitative trend analysis of test and examination results. However, as no allowance was made for other influences on results, the analysis did not provide reliable evidence of the effectiveness of funded activities. While making such allowances is challenging, requiring, for example, comparative control information, without them the analysis has little value.

3.8 The Assembly Government has specifically consulted LEAs on the issue of management information to track the progress of activities in recent years, and authorities also have the opportunity to comment on management information requirements each year during consultation on the draft circular. Nevertheless, 19 out of 22 LEAs told us that they considered that the management information requested by the Assembly Government was only partially relevant. Three authorities also told us that they considered that much of what they collected for the Assembly Government was not useful for their own purposes. The Assembly

⁹ *Final Report: The Wales Youth Access Initiative – Estyn's evaluation of projects funded by the National Assembly for Wales, June 2002.*

¹⁰ The Assembly Government has reduced the number of indicators since GEST, as a result of the reduction in the number of activity areas and to take account of the comments of LEAs on the need to streamline the monitoring system.

Government raised this issue with LEAs at the consultation meeting on the 2006/2007 draft Circular, and invited them to join discussions on developing a more useful set of measures. It is seeking to develop measures of outcomes rather than inputs, including proxy measures where direct measurement of outcomes is not feasible. An initial meeting took place during September 2005 and is being followed up in parallel with the development of guidance on evaluation.

The Assembly Government is placing greater emphasis on the need for local evaluation of the Better Schools Fund, but its guidance to LEAs does not provide practical advice on evaluation

3.9 The circular for 2004/2005, which set out the arrangements for the transition from GEST to the Better Schools Fund, signalled that the Assembly Government was committed to developing an evidence-based programme, and that LEAs and schools should establish cost-effective evaluation arrangements. And for 2005/2006, LEAs and schools were asked to supply evaluation proposals and details of evaluations carried out in 2004/2005, including conclusions drawn and lessons learned.

3.10 The Assembly Government's Better Schools Fund team told us that where LEAs did provide evaluation material in support of their plans, it tended to focus on the process of evaluation, rather than the conclusions and how these had been taken into account in developing LEA spending proposals. However, the requirements for evaluation set out in the circular for 2004/2005 were not accompanied by practical advice on how evaluations should be carried out. More than half of LEAs considered that the Assembly Government produced insufficient guidance on evaluation. Nine also told us that, as at 2004/2005, the Assembly Government had never asked them for the results of their evaluation work.

3.11 The Assembly Government has little, in terms of effective incentives or sanctions, to encourage LEAs to evaluate the impact of Better Schools Fund expenditure. However, for the first time, the Assembly Government temporarily withheld 2005/2006 grant approval from four LEAs that had not provided the required management information.

3.12 LEAs should have well-developed capabilities for evaluation, in order to effectively manage activities supported by their own funds and to meet their public accountability requirements. However, in providing targeted grants to fund activities in pursuit of its own objectives and priorities, the Assembly Government should provide guidance on the standards of evaluation it expects LEAs to carry out as a condition of grant. Moreover, in order to pursue an evidence-based programme involving a large number of partner organisations, it is essential for the Assembly Government to play a coordinating role to ensure consistency and reliability in the evidence base.

There is scope for LEAs and schools to improve their evaluation

3.13 Estyn's Annual Report for 2002/2003 stated that most LEAs could do more to evaluate the impact GEST-funded training has on the work of schools, and to identify and share good practice. Other concerns raised by Estyn included:

- GEST being used to fund short-term staff appointments without arrangements being put in place to monitor and evaluate effectively the activities undertaken by them;¹¹ and
- the lack of evaluation by LEAs of initiatives, such as the Wales Youth Access initiative, which receive a substantial investment of GEST funds.

¹¹ Estyn, *The role of LEAs in raising standards in literacy*, 2000



The monitoring and evaluation of projects varies greatly between areas and is a serious concern. Initial target setting for projects is weak. Many do not have a system to evaluate the Youth Access Initiative provision as a whole, or monitor the implementation of their plans, particularly in relation to GEST requirements.

Source: Estyn, *Final Report: The Wales Youth Access Initiative, 2002*

3.14 The examples of evaluations carried out by LEAs and schools that we examined included some that were strong in terms of assessing strengths and weakness in the design and application of initiatives. However, they provided little evidence of the effectiveness of funded activities in terms of raising standards, other than subjective assessments and references to Estyn inspection reports. This shortcoming applied to contracted-out evaluations as well as those carried out in-house.

3.15 Our field visits to, and survey returns from, LEAs also indicated that the use of funds is evaluated by LEAs to varying degrees and in different ways, although there were examples of good practice, some involving external consultants (Figures 7, 8 and 9). All LEAs said that they encouraged schools to evaluate funded activities, and four said that they did not evaluate activities themselves, but instead relied on schools' evaluations to inform LEA decisions on priorities. However, only 83 per cent of schools surveyed said LEAs encouraged them to evaluate funded activities.

3.16 In the event, only one third of schools surveyed reported any evaluation work carried out since 2003, and just 10 per cent reported that they evaluated all funded activities. The extent of evaluation carried out by schools ranged from tick box forms completed after courses have been completed to direct observation of teachers' and pupils' work and behaviour by peers or advisory staff.

Figure 7: Evaluation at Powys LEA

Powys LEA stores its evaluation data electronically on a central database, which it reviews annually as part of the development of its Education Strategic Plan. The LEA requires all course attendees to complete an evaluation form at the end of each course. Attendees score courses in terms of the extent to which learning objectives have been met, and how far the course has met stated aims and objectives. After each training event, teachers are required to draw up personal action points showing their development objectives, their role in disseminating learning within their school, and the impact of their training on the school as a whole.

Since 2004, the LEA has used a link adviser to visit schools and work alongside teachers to evaluate training and other activities, rather than relying on teachers to complete evaluation forms. This has increased both the volume and quality of evaluation.

Source: Powys LEA

Figure 8: Monitoring the impact of training in Conwy LEA

Estyn noted that Conwy has particularly effective procedures for monitoring the suitability and impact of training activities in the primary phase.

During the summer term, the LEA asks its primary schools to indicate which training events they intend to participate in during the following academic year. At the end of the academic year, the LEA requires schools to reflect on the effect the training has had, and to identify specific improvements that have occurred as a result. Schools are required to list the main action points and their impact in relation to each training event.

This approach encourages schools to consider carefully whether proposed training is consistent with their developmental needs, on the basis of their self-evaluation

continued...

and school development plan objectives. It helps schools to evaluate the effectiveness of the services they are buying from the LEA and encourages schools to make sure that training events lead to improvements in the classroom.

On subsequent visits, school link officers discuss the follow-up action that schools have identified.

Source: Estyn, Inspection of Conwy Local Education Authority School Improvement Services, 2004

Figure 9: External evaluation of GEST-funded activities

Swansea LEA evaluates its schemes at key stages using higher education experts working alongside LEA officers and teachers. The evaluations largely concern strengths and weaknesses in terms of such things as whether material is relevant to classroom needs. The evaluations are also informed by broad assessments about whether standards are improving.

The evaluations are carried out in partnership with the University of Wales, Swansea and Swansea Institute of Higher Education. The benefits to Swansea LEA include a shared understanding of the educational context in Swansea.

At **Pembrokeshire LEA** there is a three-pronged approach to evaluation of the impact of activities: by schools, by the LEA and by an external consultant commissioned by the LEA. The LEA values the objective evaluation provided by the external consultant. It focuses on the impact of the Better Schools Fund funded activities carried out on a specific priority area, for example ICT. The evaluations are used to inform future planning, and to inform stakeholders about the use made of the Better Schools Fund in Pembrokeshire.

In addition to self-evaluation, **Cardiff LEA** used external evaluators to bring an outside perspective to their Early Literacy Intervention Strategy. The external evaluation

was undertaken alongside an established and rigorous annual evaluation process carried out by each activity team and reported to the LEA's senior management.

The external evaluator was asked to gain "a snapshot view of the impact of the activities of the Early Intervention Strategy as a whole and the effectiveness of them as an integrated strategy", and to compare the Cardiff strategy with those of others LEAs in Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The external evaluation identified the strengths and shortcomings of the LEA's strategy, and enabled senior managers to identify activities which were working effectively and those where changes in emphasis were needed. It also highlighted aspects of the management of the work that needed to be restructured.

Source: Swansea, Pembrokeshire and Cardiff LEAs



Appendix 1: Methodology

- 1 Our study methodology involved the following stages:
 - evidence gathering from the Assembly Government and Estyn;
 - interviews with stakeholders from other education organisations;
 - surveys of all LEAs and a sample of schools;
 - a focus group of head teachers and deputy head teachers;
 - visits to LEAs; and
 - expert panel discussions.

Evidence gathering from the Assembly Government and Estyn

- 2 We interviewed Assembly Government officials about:
 - their contribution to the administration of GEST and the Better Schools Fund, and development of the annual circular;
 - their monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the scheme; and
 - their monitoring and evaluation of LEAs in receipt of funds.
- 3 We examined the scheme's bid, claim and payment files, and the recommendations of, and responses to, the Assembly Government's internal audit review and the Assembly Government's Department for Training and Education review of GEST.

- 4 We interviewed Estyn staff about:
 - their contribution to the administration of GEST through examination of LEA spending plans; and
 - their evaluation of the impact of funding in schools.
- 5 We examined Estyn evaluations of LEAs' spending plans.

Interviews with stakeholders from other education organisations

- 6 We interviewed senior officials at the General Teaching Council for Wales and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales about their organisations' involvement in the administration of GEST.

Surveys

- 7 We sent all 22 LEAs a survey in 2004 in order to obtain information about the administration, funding, impact and evaluation of GEST and the Better Schools Fund. All LEAs responded.
- 8 We also surveyed a sample of 10 per cent of schools in Wales (186) across all 22 LEAs. This survey also asked about the administration, funding, impact and evaluation of GEST and the Better Schools Fund. Responses were received from 51 schools (27 per cent of the sample).
- 9 Conscious of schools' workload, we co-ordinated our sample with the Assembly Government's rolling survey of schools.

- 10** We consulted all seven teachers unions on the scope of the study and asked for their views on the main study issues. One union, the National Association of Head Teachers, responded with comments.

Visits to LEAs

- 11** We visited the following five LEAs: Denbighshire; Gwynedd; Neath Port Talbot; Newport and Powys. We carried out semi-structured interviews with the appropriate Better Schools Fund coordinators, link officers (LEA advisers) and head teachers. As part of the LEA visits, we visited two schools to see how they had spent GEST and Better Schools Fund money and to gather additional views directly from teachers. We also carried out a semi-structured interview with the chair of the Newbridge/Cross Keys Consortia to document an example of consortia use of funds.
- 12** We examined and documented case examples of aspects of the administration of GEST and the Better Schools Fund in Cardiff, Pembrokeshire, Conwy, Powys and Swansea LEAs.

Focus group

- 13** We organised a small focus group of head teachers and deputy head teachers to explore their views on the planning, administration and impact of the Better Schools Fund. The group included representatives from four LEAs and included primary and secondary schools.
- 14** We are grateful to the following members of our focus group:
- Alan Fowles, Deputy Headteacher, Cowbridge Comprehensive School, Vale of Glamorgan;
 - Marc Jones, Headteacher, Ysgol Croes Atti, Flintshire;

- Kevin McNulty, Headteacher, Abercarn Primary School, Caerphilly; and
- Chris Tonkin, Headteacher, Llandrindod Wells County Primary School, Powys.

Expert panel

- 15** We constituted a panel of experts to advise us during the course of the examination. The panel members sat in an individual and advisory capacity, and had no executive role in the Auditor General for Wales' examination. We selected individuals who, together, reflected an appropriate range of stakeholders.
- 16** The panel advised us at key stages of the study. We held two meetings, which discussed:
- the study scope and methodology; and
 - our emerging findings.
- 17** Panel members also provided advice remotely on the content of our surveys, and all panel members received drafts of our key findings and recommendations for comment.
- 18** We are grateful to the following members of our expert panel, who provided helpful advice and gave freely of their time and expertise:
- Hilary Anthony, Her Majesty's Inspector, Estyn;
 - Maria Boex, Continuing Professional Development Officer, General Teaching Council for Wales;
 - Gillian Coleman, Headteacher, Williamstown Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taf;
 - Sylvia Jones, Senior Education Officer, Denbighshire Local Education Authority;



- Trevor Jones, Deputy Headteacher, Cyfarthfa High (Upper) School;
- Farrukh Khan, Her Majesty's Inspector, Estyn;
- Hugh Knight, Association of Directors of Education Wales, Chief School Services Officer, Cardiff County Council;
- John Wilkins, Deputy Headteacher, St Cyres Comprehensive School;
- John Valentine Williams, Chief Executive, Qualification, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales; and
- Seimon Williams, Education Officer, WLGA.

1999-00

Activity 1: GEST management

1a: Management of 1999-2000 programme

Activity 2: Welsh in the national curriculum/support for transferring to Welsh medium teaching

2a: Development of teachers' linguistic skills
2b: Improving standards of attainment in Welsh in primary schools
2c: Inter-authority programmes
2d: Assistance to transfer to Welsh-medium teaching

Activity 3: Raising standards through the curriculum

3a: Improving standards at primary level
3b: Improving standards at secondary level
3c: National curriculum assessment
3d: Not used – see activity 11
3e: Not used – see activity 12
3f: Physical, personal and social education
3g: Religious education
3h: Child protection
3i: Baseline assessment

Activity 4: Improving performance through new materials and technology

4a: Books and other published curriculum materials
4b: Not used
4c: Improving teachers' skills in information technology
4d: Across the curriculum
4e: Not used

Activity 13: National grid for learning

13a: National grid for learning
13b: NGFL innovative projects (collaborative bids)

Activity 5: School management and leadership

5a: Setting and monitoring targets
5b: Development of school management and leadership skills
5c: Implementation of fair funding in schools including management information systems
5d: Truancy and discipline
5e: National professional qualification for headship
5f: Training for serving head teachers

Activity 6: Support for teacher development

6a: Teachers' professional development
6b: Employment-based route into teaching
6c: Induction of newly qualified teachers

Activity 7: Provision for the under 5s

7a: Co-ordination of provision and enhancement of staff skills

Activity 8: Youth and community workers

8a: Training to support the work of youth and community workers

Activity 10: Youth access initiative

10a: Youth access initiative

Activity 16: English as an additional language

16a: English as an additional language

Activity 9: Special educational needs

9a: Enhancement of the skills of teachers of children with Special educational needs
9b: School SEN policies/code of practice
9c: Named persons/independent parental supporters and local conciliation arrangements
9d: Regional planning of SEN provision

Activity 11: Raising standards of literacy

11a: Raising standards of literacy
11b: Family literacy
11c: Summer literacy
11d: Library authorities

Activity 14: Numeracy

14a: Raising standards of numeracy
14b: Summer numeracy

Activity 12: Vocational education

12a: Vocational education
12b: National record of achievement
12c: Careers education

Activity 15: School improvement fund

15a: School improvement fund

Activity 17: Music development fund

17a: Music development fund

2000-01

Activity 1: GEST management

1a: Management of 2000-01 programme

Activity 2: Welsh in the national curriculum/support for transferring to Welsh medium teaching

2a: Development of teachers' linguistic skills
2b: Improving standards of attainment in Welsh in primary schools
2c: Inter-authority programmes
2d: Assistance to transfer to Welsh-medium teaching

Activity 3: Raising standards through the curriculum

3a: The primary sector: national curriculum review 2000
3b: The secondary sector: national curriculum review 2000 and post -16 qualification reforms
3c: National curriculum assessment
3d: Personal and social education
3e: Work related education
3f: Religious education
3g: Baseline assessment
3h: physical education and sport

Activity 4: Improving performance through new materials and technology

4a: Books and other published curriculum materials
4b: Improving teacher's skills in information technology across the curriculum

Activity 13: National grid for learning

13a: National grid for learning
13b: Collaborative projects for the innovative use of ICT to support teaching and learning

Activity 5: School leadership and management

5a: Setting and monitoring targets
5b: Implementation of fair funding in schools including management information systems
5c: Development of school management and leadership skills
5d: Professional qualification for headship
5e: Professional headship induction programme
5f: Leadership programme for serving head teachers
5g: Training to support the review of performance and pay of head and deputy head teachers
5h: Training to support development of schools performance management policies

Activity 6: Support for teacher development

6a: Teachers' professional development
6b: Employment-based route into teaching
6c: Induction of newly qualified teachers
6d: Advance skills teacher
6e: Fast track teachers

Activity 7: Provision for the under 5s

7a: Co-ordination of provision and enhancement of staff skills

Activity 8: Youth and community workers

8a: Training to support the work of youth and community workers

Activity 10: Youth access initiative

10a: Youth access initiative

Activity 19: School attendance and behaviour

19a: School attendance and behaviour
19b: Child protection

Activity 16: Ethnic minority achievement

16a: Ethnic minority achievement

Activity 9: Special educational needs

9a: Enhancement of the skills of teachers of children with special educational needs
9b: School SEN policies/code of practice
9c: Named persons/independent parental supporters and local conciliation arrangements
9d: Regional planning of SEN provision

Activity 11: Literacy

11a: Raising standards of literacy
11b: Family literacy
11c: Summer literacy
11d: Library authorities

Activity 14: Numeracy

14a: Raising standards of numeracy
14b: Summer numeracy

Activity 12: Vocational and careers education

12a: Vocational education
12b: National record of achievement
12c: Careers education

Activity 15: School improvement fund

15a: School improvement fund

Activity 18: Classroom support fund

18a: Classroom support fund

Activity 17: Music development fund

17a: Music development fund

Activity 7: Welsh in the national curriculum/transferring to Welsh-medium teaching

- 7a: Raising standards across key stages
- 7b: Inter-authority programmes
- 7c: Assisting transfer to Welsh-medium teaching

Activity 1: Raising standards

- 1a: Revised national curriculum (primary)
- 1b: Revised national curriculum (secondary)
- 1c: Pupil assessment
- 1d: Books and other materials
- 1e: Work related education
- 1f: Personal and social education
- 1g: Religious education
- 1h: Physical education
- 1i: Post 16 qualifications

Activity 9: Information and communications technologies in schools

- 9a: National grid for learning
- 9b: Effective use of ICT in schools
- 9c: Joint authority projects

Activity 10: Professional development

- 10a: National headship development programme
- 10b: Teachers' continuing professional development
- 10c: Governor training and support for school performance management

Activity 3: Early years learning

- 3a: Early years learning

Activity 5: Tackling social disadvantage

- 5a: Youth and community workers
- 5b: Youth access
- 5c: Ethnic minority achievement
- 5d: School attendance and behaviour
- 5e: Child protection
- 5f: Looked after children

Activity 6: Special educational needs

- 6a: Enhancement of the skills of teachers of children with special educational needs, learning support assistants and training of welsh speaking SEN specialists
- 6b: School SEN policies/revised SEN code of practice
- 6c: Named persons/independent parental supporters and local conciliation arrangements
- 6d: Regional planning of SEN provision

Activity 4: Literacy and numeracy

- 4a: Raising standards of literacy
- 4b: Family literacy and numeracy
- 4c: Summer literacy
- 4d: Support for library authorities
- 4e: Raising standards of numeracy
- 4f: Summer numeracy

Activity 2: Planning for success

- 2a: School improvement fund
- 2b: Setting and monitoring targets
- 2c: Leadership and management skills for school governors
- 2d: Classroom support fund

Activity 8: Out of hours prospectus

- 8a: Music development fund
- 8b: Out of hours learning

Activity 7: Welsh in the national curriculum/ transferring to Welsh-medium teaching

- 7a: Raising standards across key stages
- 7b: Inter-authority programmes
- 7c: Assisting transfer to Welsh-medium teaching

Activity 1: Raising standards

- 1a: Revised national curriculum (primary)
- 1b: Revised national curriculum (secondary)
- 1c: Pupil assessment
- 1d: Books and other materials
- 1e: Work related education
- 1f: Personal and social education
- 1g: Religious education
- 1h: Physical education
- 1i: Post 16 qualifications

Activity 9: Information and communications technologies in schools

- 9a: National grid for learning
- 9b: Effective use of ICT in schools
- 9c: Joint authority projects

Activity 10: Professional development

- 10a: National headship development programme (NHDP) and school leadership modules (SLMs)
- 10b: Teachers' continuing professional development
- 10c: Governor training and support for school performance management

Activity 3: Early years learning

- 3a: Early years learning

Activity 5: Tackling social disadvantage

- 5a: Youth and community workers
- 5b: Youth access
- 5c: Ethnic minority achievement
- 5d: School attendance and behaviour
- 5e: Child protection
- 5f: Looked after children

Activity 6: Special educational needs

- 6a: Enhancement of the skills of teachers of children with special educational needs, learning support assistants and training of welsh speaking SEN specialists
- 6b: School SEN policies/revised SEN code of practice
- 6c: Named persons/independent parental supporters and local conciliation arrangements
- 6d: Speech and language therapy provision for children with SEN

Activity 4: Literacy and numeracy

- 4a: Raising standards of literacy
- 4b: Family literacy and numeracy
- 4c: Summer literacy
- 4d: Support for library authorities
- 4e: Raising standards of numeracy
- 4f: Summer numeracy

Activity 2: Planning for success

- 2a: School improvement fund
- 2b: Setting and monitoring targets
- 2c: Leadership and management skills for school governors
- 2d: Classroom support fund

Activity 8: Out of hours prospectus

- 8a: Music development fund
- 8b: Out of hours learning

Activity 7: Welsh in the national curriculum/ transferring to Welsh-medium teaching

- 7a: Raising standards across key stages
- 7b: National welsh inset programme and national Welsh-medium inset programme
- 7c: Assisting transfer to welsh-medium teaching

Activity 1: Raising standards

- 1a: Broader-curriculum
- 1b: National curriculum
- 1c: Religious education and collective worship
- 1d: Pupil assessment
- 1e: Qualifications

Activity 9: ICT in schools

- 9a: National grid for learning
- 9b: Effective use of ICT in schools
- 9c: Joint authority projects
- 9d: Broadband network for lifelong learning

Activity 10: Professional development

- 10a: National headship development programme (NHDP) and school leadership modules (SLMs)
- 10b: Induction and early professional development
- 10c: Other teacher development and support

Activity 3: Early years learning

- 3a: Early years learning

Activity 5: Pupil and youth support

- 5a: Youth and community workers
- 5b: Youth access
- 5c: Ethnic minority achievement
- 5d: School attendance and behaviour
- 5e: Child protection
- 5f: Looked after children

Activity 6: Special educational needs

- 6a: Skills for working with SEN pupils
- 6b: School SEN policies/revised SEN code of practice
- 6c: Parental support and conciliation
- 6d: Speech and language therapy
- 6e: Multi-sensory impaired advisory scheme (Consortia Spending Plans only)

Activity 4: Literacy and numeracy

- 4a: Raising standards of literacy
- 4b: Family literacy and numeracy
- 4c: Summer literacy
- 4d: Support for library authorities
- 4e: Raising standards of numeracy
- 4f: Summer numeracy

Activity 2: Planning for success

- 2a: School improvement fund
- 2b: Setting and monitoring targets
- 2c: Leadership and management skills for school governors
- 2d: Classroom support fund

Activity 8: Out of hours prospectus

- 8a: Music development fund
- 8b: Out of hours learning

Activity 5: Iaith pawb mewn ysgolion

- 5a: Raising standards across key stages
- 5b: Assisting transfer to Welsh-medium teaching

Activity 5: Iaith pawb mewn ysgolion

- 5a: Raising standards across key stages
- 5b: Extending pupil opportunities to practice and experience Welsh

Activity 7: ICT in schools

- 7a: National grid for learning
- 7b: Effective use of ICT in schools
- 7c: Broadband network for lifelong learning

Activity 6: ICT in schools

- 6a: National grid for learning
- 6b: Effective use of ICT in schools
- 6c: Broadband network for lifelong learning

Activity 8: Professional development

- 8a: National headship development programme and school leadership modules
- 8b: Induction and early professional development

Activity 7: Induction and early professional development

- 7a: Induction and early professional development

Activity 3: Pupil support

- 3a: Ethnic minority achievement
- 3b: School attendance and behaviour
- 3c: Child protection
- 3d: Looked after children
- 3e: Out of hours learning

Activity 3: Pupil support

- 3a: Ethnic minority achievement grant
- 3b: School attendance and behaviour
- 3c: Child protection
- 3d: Looked after children
- 3e: Out of hours learning

Activity 4: Special educational needs

- 4a: Skills for working with SEN pupils
- 4b: School SEN policies/revised SEN code of practice
- 4c: Parental partnership services and disagreement resolution services
- 4d: Speech and language therapy
- 4e: Multi-sensory impaired advisory scheme

Activity 4: Additional educational needs

- 4a: Skills for working with pupils with additional educational needs
- 4b: School inclusion (SEN) policies/revised SEN code of practice for Wales
- 4c: Disagreement resolution services
- 4d: Speech and language services
- 4e: Multi-sensory impaired advisory scheme

Activity 1: School curriculum

- 1a: Literacy and numeracy
- 1b: Effective transition
- 1c: Key areas for curriculum development

Activity 1: School curriculum

- 1a: Literacy and numeracy
- 1b: Effective transition
- 1c: Key areas for curriculum development
- 1d: Joint working amongst small schools

Activity 2: Governor training

- 2a: Leadership skills for school governors

Activity 2: Governor training

- 2a: Leadership and strategic development skills for school Governors

Activity 6: Music development fund

- 6a: Music development fund