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Clerk to the Audit Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

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CARDIFF CF99 1NA

Government Response to the Audit Committee report on the Management of the Further Education Estate in Wales

Thank you for your letter of 10 October 2003 about the response from the Welsh Assembly Government to the Audit Committee's report on *Management of the Further Education Estate in Wales*. You asked for the Auditor General's advice on the contents of the response and on any follow up action which the Committee might take.

In its report the Committee made eight recommendations. The first seven, each of which has been accepted by Government, were directed at further education institutions or the National Council for Education and Training for Wales. The Government's response explains the action being taken by the further education sector to improve the condition of the estate and the National Council's role in ensuring these improvements, through identifying its funding priorities, strengthening the resourcing of its property section, and agreeing and publishing targets for the achievement of improvements to the estate. Members may be particularly interested in recommendation i) which concerned institutions' duty to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The National Council will report to the Committee in December 2003 on progress made by institutions in addressing this issue. The Auditor General will advise the Committee further as appropriate at that point.

Recommendation viii) was that the Auditor General advise the Committee on the progress being made by the Assembly in response to previous Committee recommendations about the current model for the further education sector. The Committee had previously referred this policy issue to the relevant Minister to consider, in view of the failures in financial management and governance at Coleg Gwent. Recommendation viii) has been overtaken as the Government's response sets out the outcome of its review of this issue: the Government is unambiguously clear that it is satisfied that the current model is appropriate and conducive to the delivery of the Assembly Government's agenda.

Without further recent examples of the failures experienced at Coleg Gwent, and in view of the assurances provided by the Government as to the powers available to the National Council, there is no need for the Committee to pursue this matter further. The Auditor General for Wales will continue to keep a watching brief over the sector and the role of the National Council and will bring any further concerns that may arise to the attention of the Audit Committee.

I hope that this is helpful.

James Verity
Acting Private Secretary to the Auditor General for Wales