

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

ELL2 09-05(p.7)

Note of visit to ACCAC

Date: Thursday 1 June 2005

Time: 9:00 - 11:30

Venue: ACCAC offices, Womanby Street, Cardiff

Rapporteur Group

Janet Ryder AM

Jeff Cuthbert AM

Steve George (Committee Clerk)

Holly Pembridge (Deputy Committee Clerk)

Siân Hughes (Members' Research Service)

ACCAC Representatives

Wil Edmunds (Chairman)

John Valentine Williams (Chief Executive)

Dr John Lloyd (Commissioning Manager) – part of the meeting

The rapporteur group were welcomed to ACCAC. The group explained that the visit was part of a series of visits to ASPBs to help the Committee to understand their work.

Commissioning

Wil Edmunds invited Dr Lloyd to make a presentation on ACCAC's commissioning work. Dr Lloyd made the following points:

- ACCAC had a budget of £1.5m for commissioning Welsh and bilingual materials for schools, plus an allocation from Iaith Pawb funding.
- Support was made for first and second language teaching of Welsh for pupils aged 3-4 up to GCSE and A level. 30% of the materials were for the teaching of Welsh as a language. The remainder was for subjects taught through the medium of Welsh. Where subjects were technical, ACCAC would look for suitable materials to translate. Where the curriculum is sufficiently

different, ACCAC will commission bilingual materials.

- ACCAC:
- Identifies what materials are needed based on consultation with schools and panels of teachers led by ACCAC subject officers. Around 50 projects will be prioritised;
- Finds publishers through a tender process on the basis of how much subsidy is required;
- Quality control and monitor publications.

Other points made in relation to commissioning were:

- The process for identification and prioritisation is rigorous. There are very clear principles that a publication must be accurate, appropriate for the subject and the target audience and readable across the whole of Wales. Publications do not usually include regional differences of language. Books published bilingually must be published at the same time, to the same standard and at the same sale price.
- Standardising terms especially for subjects such as science has been a challenge, but there is now an accepted language code.
- ACCAC are producing multi-media material, including DVDs, CD ROMs and on-line material – they have worked with the National Grid for Learning on the latter.

In response to the rapporteur group's questions, ACCAC representatives made the following points:

- There are nearly 300 Welsh medium books in Braille or with large print. The RNIB has a library system and published a catalogue.
- If sales figures for a particular publication are high, ACCAC claw-back some of their subsidy – there is a £20,000 threshold. This is not seen as a disincentive for publishers.
- ELWa also has a budget for producing Welsh language and bilingual publications – they use this for post-16 material, including vocational qualifications. ACCAC provides materials for use in schools. The remit has recently changed to include the Foundation Phase. Materials for the Welsh Baccalaureate are not published by ACCAC as yet.
- There would need for a proper analysis before considering whether commissioning for school curriculum and vocational materials could be combined, post-merger. ACCAC's role is different from ELWa's as ACCAC has subject experts in school curriculum areas but not in vocational areas
- The Foundation Phase is gradually being rolled out. There have been no Welsh language or bilingual materials commissioned as yet, although games and activity based materials are on stream.
- There is a strong emphasis on additional educational needs running throughout all of ACCAC's work. There is an SEN commissioning panel.

Operational Plan – 2005/06

John Valentine Williams gave a brief over-view of the structure of ACCAC and outlined some of the objectives in the operational plan.

Qualifications

Comments made included:

- ACCAC's statutory role was to assure that qualifications meet standards and the awarding process is rigorous.
- They ensure that qualifications are delivered properly.
- They are ensuring that Wales' interest is kept in view with regards to the UK policy developments (e.g. the Tomlinson Report) as all awarding bodies offer qualifications in Wales and the WJEC offers qualifications in England.
- The modernisation agenda is under active consideration;
- ACCAC is working with the Sector Skills Councils to determine skill needs, provision and the need for change.
- Wales is committed to a credit based culture. The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) is all embracing and includes Higher Education which is not the case in England.

In response to the rapporteur group's questions, ACCAC representatives made the following points:

- There is a National Occupational Standards Board, which ensures that vocational standards are the same across the UK.
- Having a vocational qualification does not necessarily mean that a person has key skills. These often come with a period of acclimatisation working in a job. Basic Skills are being met through the Basic Skills Strategy and the Employers' Pledge. The need for people to have basic and key skills has been identified and is being addressed. ACCAC are looking at GCSE maths and English to make more explicit the functional needs of the subject. ACCAC are looking at the work undertaken with Airbus where gaps in skills were identified and addressed, to see whether this work could be credited, and are also working with Health Professions Wales to map the competencies of those working in the healthcare sector who are not graduates.
- Although some employers may like to see a single transparent qualification, it is important to recognise that differing sectors have differing needs. It is important that employers know what a qualification means and skills need to be relevant.
- GCSEs and A levels are not getting easier. Rather, pupils are working harder and being taught better than before.. In a high skill economy it is important for people to work hard and for skills standards have to be driven up.
- The provisional view is that the Welsh Baccalaureate is providing a better, rounded qualification. With the Welsh Baccalaureate, pupils work in groups and this helps develop interpersonal skills.
- The curriculum review is looking at the balance between skills and knowledge.

Support for Welsh Medium Qualifications

ACCAC survey all Welsh medium centres to see what they plan to teach. ACCAC works with awarding bodies to ensure that a Welsh medium qualification is in place and that awarding bodies have a clear Welsh language policy. There is also a need to ensure that there are enough Welsh medium practitioners. This is a growth area and ACCAC are thinking strategically about investment.

Quinnquennial Review

The majority of recommendations made in the Quinnquennial Review have been met, apart from those that have been overtaken by or will be incorporated into the merger with the Welsh Assembly Government. A closure report will be written before the end of the summer. The Quinnquennial Review mentioned that ACCAC's profile needed to be raised – perhaps more needed to be done outside of schools, but in the further education sector this becomes more complex. In response to the rapporteur group's questions, ACCAC representatives made the following points:

- There was thought to be no danger of a loss of independence when the qualifications accreditation system becomes part of the Welsh Assembly Government, post-merger. The head of the department would be recognised as the regulator and there were already examples of civil servants having independent roles, such as the Chief Medical Officer.
- An organisation chart had been published which shows how ACCAC's functions would fit into the new Department.
- Any new qualifications must meet published criteria and the demands of a Code of Practice before they are accredited. ACCAC also looks at proliferation and the quality of the qualification and of the awarding body.
- If European Social Funding was to be withdrawn, the CQFW could still proceed, but perhaps at a slower timescale.
- Wales is leading the way on credit-based qualifications. ACCAC is working with the prison service and probation services to see whether their work with young offenders can be credited.
- ACCAC believe that there will be better joined up thinking post-merger. There are issues of leadership and cultural change and there needs to be a balance of what can be achieved by 1 April 2006 and continuity.
- There is a challenge in the organisation of 14-19 education. With regard to the Welsh Baccalaureate, ACCAC are exploring how to bring the qualification to 14 year-olds.

Curriculum

ACCAC supports schools in the curriculum and is heavily involved in other agendas such as sustainable development and food and fitness by helping with their expertise. ACCAC worked in response to the McPherson Report and try to mainstream equality throughout the curriculum orders and explain how equality issues can be addressed through what is already being taught.

Inclusion and Access

ACAC are leading in access for disabled pupils and for those pupils with additional needs in terms of individual qualifications and through ensuring consistency of assessment processes. Guidance on religious education is made to be consistent with the national curriculum orders. There needs to be a balance between knowledge and values in the subjects of work-related education, religious education and personal and social education.