

# **Education and Lifelong Learning Committee**

## **Note of visit to Estyn**

**Date: Thursday 22 September 2005**

**Time: 10:00 - 11:30**

**Venue: Estyn offices, Anchor Court, Keen Road, Cardiff**

### **Rapporteur Group**

Peter Black AM, Chair, Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Janet Ryder AM

William Graham AM

David Blair (Members' Research Service)

Siân Hughes (Members' Research Service)

### **Estyn Representatives**

Susan Lewis, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales

Hilary Anthony, Head of Inspection Division - Early years education, schools and the work of LEAs

Shan Howells Head of Division: Policy, Planning and Corporate Services

Liz Kidd, Head of Inspection Division: Post-16 Education and Training

### **Inspection arrangements**

Miss Lewis explained that much of Estyn's work for the current year follows from the introduction of the new inspection arrangements introduced last September. Estyn is also introducing a new database to be known as "Athene" and had appointed a new Board in the past year.

Points relating to inspection arrangements included reference to the following issues:

- The new inspection arrangements had anticipated public sector reform.
- The central theme of inspections is listening to learners to gauge their views on their education and learning. Estyn has always focussed on outcomes for learners, but the new arrangements develop this approach further.
- Estyn has responded to concerns that inspections are too remote by involving nominees from those providers being inspected. Nominees are involved in all aspects of the inspection process. This development has been very successful.
- A programme of peer assessment has been developed. This enables someone from a similar organisation to that being inspected to train with Estyn and take part in inspections. Peer assessment is also helpful in developing self-assessment, which Estyn believes to be at the heart of improvement in education and training.
- Estyn believes that it is driving up standards through inspection, but that improvement does not only rely on inspection. It also relies on good quality self evaluation and developmental planning which inspection helps to promote.
- The notice period for inspections has been reduced for schools where it was much longer than that in other sectors.
- There are about 700 independent inspectors who are all monitored and trained by Estyn.
- Estyn has developed a risk-based approach to inspection. The level of risk identified determines the type of inspection undertaken.
- Estyn had gained further responsibilities and now inspects Young People's Partnerships. These inspections look at how the partnership works together and how learners access the services.
- Special schools all receive a full inspection.

## **Database**

A major piece of work in the last year in Estyn has been the development of a database (Athene) which will bring together all the evidence from all of Estyn's inspections. The information that the database will contain will be of benefit to Estyn's remit work. It will include data from September 2005, but the continued availability of previous databases will allow Estyn to access historic trends in many respects.

## **Board**

Estyn has also set up an advisory Board since last year comprising senior executives and 3 non-executive directors whose responsibilities include ensuring that the organisation is operating appropriately and efficiently. It meets around six times a year. Estyn also has an Audit Committee with an independent chair. An appointment to a forthcoming vacancy on the Board and on the Audit Committee will shortly be made through open recruitment.

## **Other UK and Wales Inspectorates**

Estyn works closely with other Wales and UK inspectorates to co-ordinate inspection activity, so as to avoid duplication. However there is a need to keep discrete elements and retain the expertise of individual agencies. Where there is an overlap in inspections between Estyn and another inspectorate, Estyn inspects the educational provision.

## **LEA Inspections**

LEA inspections do not fit within the Common Inspection Framework, however, the LEA inspection framework has been reviewed and the new arrangements will include several aspects of the Common Inspection Framework. The self evaluation criteria are being reviewed also. There will also be peer assessors and nominees. In Wales, LEA inspections previously followed the Best Value route and focused on services which had undergone a Best Value review. There is a six-year cycle and LEAs are now given a choice of having an inspection conducted over a number of years or in one year. Audit Commission inspectors are part of the inspection team and the Social Services Inspectorate are invited to join. A risk assessment will determine the scale of the inspection.

## **Independent Schools**

Estyn has just begun inspecting independent schools. The Common Inspection Framework is used. Estyn looks at quality and standards in independent schools and whether there is a broad and balanced curriculum. The independent sector is very diverse and it is not subject to the same requirements as maintained schools, e.g. schools are not required to follow the National Curriculum (although some choose to). No independent school fully meets the registration requirements. In these cases, independent schools inspected have to produce an action plan and Estyn may re-visit them if there are significant shortcomings.

## **Local area inspections of 14 + provision**

Estyn is undertaking local area inspections, such as inspections of 14-19 provision within a specific area. These inspections test collaborative and partnership working, look at leadership and action taken, as there are many partners. The inspections are not confined to specific LEAs, for example there are plans to inspect 14-19 provision in the "Menai corridor" which would include several LEAs. Estyn would welcome doing more local area inspections, but these have a resource implication.

## **Staff and funding**

Estyn currently has some twelve inspectors seconded into the organisation at a broad cost of about £1 million. That funding has not been guaranteed long-term, which would allow Estyn to recruit more staff. The recruitment process can be lengthy and cross over financial years, which causes problems with future planning. As there is no guaranteed funding in the longer term it is difficult to appoint new staff if there is a possibility of making them redundant in the future, which in itself is costly. Underspend is currently being utilised with secondees, but there is an investment in their training which is lost when

they return to their home institution. This uncertain situation has meant that Estyn has had to make decisions about where its inspections would make most impact.

## **Work-based learning**

Leaders are not looking enough at quality development. Estyn works closely with Fforwm and the National Training Federation, encouraging them to work within their sectors to promote quality.

Other points discussed in relation to Work Based Learning were that:

- There has been an expanded peer assessment programme on which Estyn has worked closely with ELWa, which has been slow to progress. Estyn has also established link inspectors for ELWa regions and they are involved in networks and workshops.
- There is no overall structure for training or staff development in Work Based Learning.
- Providers meet the contract requirements, but do not necessarily embrace good practice. Estyn believes that the situation will improve.
- Some of the poorest performing providers train people for work in the health and social services, which is a concern, as trainees will eventually work with more vulnerable people.
- The best providers tend to be smaller ones who cater for niche markets with high level skills.

In response to a question about Welsh medium requirements, Estyn stated that the needs of those who wish to learn through the medium of Welsh are not being identified by providers.

In response to a statement that there have been complaints that people undertaking work-based training have poor basic skills, Estyn said that they have been in discussions with ELWa and the National Training Federation about this.

In response to a question on whether there had been a decline in standards in literacy and numeracy, Estyn said that there have been many changes in expectations in this area and there are now different measures. It is therefore difficult to judge. The National Curriculum has provided an entitlement for everyone, but this can't be seen as an end in itself.

In response to a question as to whether life skills courses were inspected where they are run in places such as foyers, Estyn confirmed that if the courses received funding from ELWa, they were inspected. Courses for the training of community development workers were not inspected, but attention was being drawn to this in the inspection of 14-19 provision. Estyn would also like to inspect professional training for all the areas of work inspected by them. Initial teacher training is inspected by Estyn, but the training of lecturers is inspected by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, Estyn has a remit to inspect everything funded by ELWa. This needs to be thought out in terms of ELWa's merger with the National Assembly.

## **ASPB mergers**

In response to a question about the ASPB mergers with the Welsh Assembly Government, Estyn said they had a good relationship with ELWa and DfTE, and that although post-merger there may be a slightly different tilt to the relationship Estyn had no reason to think the relationship would be poorer. Estyn felt that they should continue to be a demonstrably independent body.

In response to a question about the monitoring of Estyn, Estyn said that there are a number of routes through which they are monitored such as the Wales Audit Office, Estyn's own Board, and internal audit. To ensure common quality assurance, most inspectors use the same inspection framework. There is also training and updating of skills, all staff have personal development plans and have twice yearly reviews, and feedback is sought on inspections. Inspections are monitored by either Managing HMI or HMI. There have been fewer complaints about inspections and there are consultative forums with each of the sectors who are inspected with contractors, LEAs, schools, post-16 providers and learners represented.

### **Special Educational Needs (SEN)**

Estyn has given evidence for the first stage of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's three-phase review of SEN and would be content to give further evidence as required.

### **Members' Research and Committee Services** **10 October 2005**