

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 27 MARCH 2003.

Amongst other things, this report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 27 February 2003. **Annex A** sets out my major engagements since the last report.

1. END OF TERM REPORT

INTRODUCTION

1. This is my final report as Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to this Committee. In addition to current points of interest and details of engagements, I thought it would be timely to offer a general review of what we have achieved as an Assembly.

2. Effective provision for education and lifelong learning takes time to grow. Together with my predecessors and the preceding Committees, for Post 16 Education and Training and Pre 16, Schools and Early Learning we have set a distinctive policy agenda for Wales which is being implemented with a great deal of partnership across Wales and across the sectors. This has entailed significant policy statements and strategies and successful partnership to secure primary legislation. The Learning Country is a comprehensive strategic statement of all aspects of education and training in Wales. The bespoke Welsh clauses secured in the Education Act 2002 gave us the legislative underpinnings for this programme. These include:

- Separate statutory basis for the national curriculum in Wales, which will facilitate development of the foundation stage and change at key stage 4;
- Powers to secure regional provision for pupils with low incidence special educational needs;
- Establishment of a separate Special Educational Needs Tribunal for Wales;
- Requiring LEAs to enter into partnership agreements with their schools;
- Facilitating pupil transition from primary school to secondary school by requiring secondary schools and their feeder primary schools to plan for transition;
- Establishing school budget forums in each LEA;
- Giving governing bodies powers to provide services for their local communities.

We have set out a distinctive Made in Wales agenda, securing a broad consensus around many of the key objectives.

3. Thus, for example, there has been strong consensus about the importance of early years provision. One of the Pre 16 Education, and Early Learning Committee's earliest policy reviews focused on early years provision. The recent consultation on the Foundation phase set out the Government's formal

proposal for the way forward. It drew on that earlier work and on the work of expert advisers and partners across Wales. It promises much for the future. Under our strategic objective of giving **every child a flying start**, we have:

- agreed to fund early years education for all three year olds whose parents want it. This is supported by new resources of £16m in 2003-2004 and we are well on way to meeting the target set out in Better Wales and Plan for Wales to make provision for the shortfall of 7,500 early years places by September 2004. Local authorities and other partners will have already provided **almost 70%** of them by 31 March.
- facilitated 11 **integrated centres** at a total Assembly investment of £3.2m by the end of the current financial year, with more planned for next year.
- expanded the **Family Literacy and Numeracy** Schemes as part of our all-age Basic Skills Strategy for Wales.
- sought and gained powers to establish **SEN Tribunal for Wales**; the Tribunal will be established from 1 April based in Llandrindod Wells.

4. There are over half a million pupils in our school system. Having **excellent schools** which deliver **the highest possible standards of teaching and learning for all our children** has been a key priority. The current Committee's studies into "the School of the Future" has demonstrated how wide the reach of this subject can be. It relates to the innovative steps we have taken to date on our own course on performance in secondary schools and testing at key stage 1. It extends from the role of the school in the community, to the community of learners and practitioners, as well as to more practical considerations of school buildings fit for the future. During our first term as an Assembly we have

- **secured a step change in investment in schools buildings** - providing over £100m for 2002-2003 rising, to £139m per annum for 2005-06 onwards. In partnership with local and church authorities and through their developing asset management planning, we shall ensure that schools are in good physical shape, fit for purpose and well maintained - our target for 2010. Within this, we are giving attention to facilities for regional SEN provision. Additional resources have been made available for the improvement of Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn Special School and other schemes are being considered.
- **promoted higher standards in schools.** The Chief Inspector's reports have charted the steady improvement and the latest report shows that 97% of classes are satisfactory or better. The extension of Estyn's remit to other providers has given us a coherent and consistent inspection platform across almost the whole range of education and training. The Narrowing the Gap work we have undertaken with the WLGA and other partners has demonstrated that the gap in the performance of our least well and our best performing schools has not narrowed and we have to tackle that challenge if pupils in less advantaged areas are to have equality of opportunity with their peers

- **put the assessment of learners first.** There has been strong progress towards meeting desired outcomes over the years. **Fewer pupils than ever before** (3% of pupils 1,113) leave full time education with no qualifications - down 16% since 1999. We met our Key Stage 2 targets for 2002 with over 70% of 11 year olds achieving at level 4 in the separate core subjects. **50 per cent** of 15-year-olds achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C and **85 per cent** achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G; and at A level the average points score for 17-year-olds entered for 2 or more A levels or equivalent now stands at an **all-time high** of 20. There has been some serious discussion of targets and assessment during the Committee's review of the School of the Future and emerging too from consultation on the Learning Country. I hope to consult on new approaches to targets for the future across the range of education and training drawing on the experience we have had of encouraging and clear direction of travel and the best possible use of quantitative data in the interests of learners.
- **achieved infant class sizes** of no more than 30 pupils (other than permitted short term exceptions) and made additional funding available to LEAs to also cut junior class sizes. The average primary class size is now under 25 pupils and numbers of pupils in junior classes of over 30 has come down from 29% to 17% in September 2002 and is set to fall again in September 2003 as a result of the additional funding for class sizes that the Assembly has approved for 2003-04
- provided **additional resources** to support innovation in the running of **small and rural schools** and revised guidance to emphasise the need for high quality education provision in rural areas as in all parts of Wales. We have encouraged LEAs and schools to explore alternative ways of working, which include collaboration and sharing resources.
- ensured sharp increases in **funding for schools**. Appropriate recognition of the funding needs of schools has been included in the annual local government revenue settlement and although there continues to be disquiet amongst schools in some traditionally low funding LEAs as the paper to note demonstrates, overall there is a good story to tell
- acted to introduce our own distinctive approaches to supporting schools and local authorities in **tackling disaffection and truancy**.
- invested in support for education in and through Welsh – **an additional £7m** announced recently following the Culture and ELL Committees' wide ranging review.

5. These achievements have been won through and with learners and practitioners and all the other interested stakeholders. The benefits of close partnership with the professions within the context of our devolved responsibilities are evident in the engagement of the profession across the board and notably in programmes such as Extending Entitlement, reducing bureaucratic burdens; and the development of continuing professional development and performance management. **Making Wales an outstanding place to teach as well as to learn** cannot be achieved without support for the professional development of practitioners at all levels. That entails

respect for the profession's independence in a mature partnership. In addition, we have:

6. Thus we have provided increased funding which has resulted in the number of full-time equivalent qualified teachers employed in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in Wales increasing to 27,481 in January 2002 an increase over the equivalent figure in 1999 of 457.

- secured legislation for and established the **General Teaching Council** for Wales to further the professional development and standing of teachers.
- introduced a pilot range of individually -orientated **continuous professional development** opportunities for teachers – **over £25m** being provided from 2002-2003 to 2005-2006.
- initiated **performance management arrangements** for school teachers that will raise standards and help teachers identify their development needs.
- introduced **Induction and Early Professional** Development for newly qualified teachers entering the profession to provide a bridge between teacher training and continuous professional development.
- developed a **Professional Headship Induction** Programme for newly appointed headteachers – that is unique to Wales.
- developed and piloted Senior **Leadership** Modules and the Leadership Programme for Serving Heads to raise standards of leadership in schools.
- signed, with DfES and the teaching and support staff unions, an historic agreement on **teachers' workload**.
- budgeted to deliver **£21m** over the next three years from 2003-04 to provide additional administrative support for schools to help reduce teachers' workload following on from a project in partnership with the unions and local authorities to reduce bureaucratic burdens.

7. The focus for learning has not simply been on the school or on maintaining and improving existing approaches. **Learning opportunities need to be provided for all and the barriers to learning removed.** The opportunities we are creating extend from piloting new qualifications to our plans for new and exciting learning pathways for 14 to 19 year olds. In addition the Assembly has :

- begun **piloting a Welsh baccalaureate**
- developed the essential features of a **Credit and Qualifications Framework** for Wales and begun a process of implementation so that learners might learn incrementally at a pace and place that suits them in future.
- consulted on a new **approach to learning for 14 to 19** year olds.
- ensured that **two thirds of 16-18 year olds** continued their education, at school or at further or higher education institutions.
- established, following policy review work in Committee, an **Advisory Panel on ICT** in schools which includes representatives from local

authorities, schools, teachers and the ICT industry to plan for the future strategic direction of ICT in schools; an **ICT Task Force** to develop strategic initiatives and provide advice on procurement, ensuring that we get the best use and value out of the new technologies; and the **National Grid for Learning Cymru**, an education portal for Wales providing online learning resources for schools. We have provided funding for **ICT Learning Centres** in over 400 school and community venues as part of the £18 million ICT for Learning strategy. Working in partnership with local education authorities and schools we extended the availability of ICT resources to learners across Wales and in particular to disadvantaged communities. We have also established a post 16 e-learning strategy group to ensure that the potential of the new ICT infrastructure and of interactive e-learning services extend the range of opportunities for lifelong learning in the home, college, community and workplace throughout Wales

- introduced the new **Assembly Learning Grant**.
- introduced - the first UK country to do so - a successor **Individual Learning Account** programme with the launch of ILA Wales on 27 February 2003.
- introduced an all age **Basic Skills Strategy** for Wales.
- Introduced “**Extending Entitlement**” which is very much a “made-in-Wales” approach. It was the very first Assembly Government policy initiative to receive unanimous, all-party support when it was initially debated in Plenary over 2 years ago. It cuts across all elements of young people’s learning, economic and recreational activity and has implications for their health and wellbeing and the lives and vibrancy of our communities.

8. Learning is a vital component of a successful economy as well as a vital component for social and cultural and personal fulfilment. The Assembly has been well aware that it must nurture **links between learning and business** and develop new opportunities for work based learning as set out in major documents from A Winning Wales to the Skills and Employment Action Plan. To take this forward we have:

- produced a **Skills and Employment Action Plan** setting out over 53 real action points based on the previous Future Skills Wales research with recommendations of the Wales Skills Taskforce. Over its first year 39 activities have been implemented and 14 are in the pipeline.
- started to introduce a new network of **Sector Skills Councils** in Wales, to replace the National Training Organisations, work with businesses to identify and develop training solutions to meet the needs within different sectors. These councils will have strong backing from employers, as well as the ability to draw additional private investment in training, and work in partnership with a range of organisations to resolve skills issues. Skillset Cymru the Welsh arm of one of the first Trailblazer Sector Skills Councils launched end of last (calendar) year.
- established a real prospect of **regeneration through learning** in the areas of Gwent worst hit by the Corus closures.

- launched the **Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF)** to increase union capacity to encourage and support learning in the workplace. In the 4 years since its launch, WULF has provided nearly £1.5m to fund 56 projects.
- Under the guidance of the Wales New Deal Task Force, worked with Jobcentre Plus to help **50,000 people into jobs** in Wales through the New Deal.
- introduced our pilot **Learning Workers Wales project** in Llanelli - which provides free learning up to NVQ Level 3 for all those in employment in Llanelli.
- created **new opportunities for work based training** through an all age skills programme - a Made in Wales policy - through:
 - removing age limits for entry to and completion of Modern Apprenticeships to open up training opportunities for all;
 - establishing new Skills development Fund making a further half a million pounds available for 2003-04 to support innovative projects to help others develop and introduce new ways to improve workforce skills;
 - introducing the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA). . . Over 1,400 are already in training. The initiative is unique to Wales and will involve developing frameworks which are bespoke to the needs of Welsh businesses and their workforces, have credibility throughout the UK and beyond but at the same time be flexible.
- driven forward on **Modern Apprenticeships** in Wales so that we are well on the way to reaching the challenging target set out in 'A Plan for Wales' of 14,000 people in training on an apprenticeship or the Modern Skills Diploma Adults by 31st March 2004. There are almost 12,800 people in Wales currently benefiting from high quality training through Modern Apprenticeships and MSDA which will provide qualifications at NVQ level 3 and above.
- introduced the first **all-age advice and guidance service** through Careers Wales. The service has been developed to become more client-sensitive and accessible to individuals of all ages, educational institutions and businesses. From 2003-04 all adults will be eligible to receive in-depth guidance; up to 100 schools and colleges will be working with Careers Wales towards achieving the Quality Award in Careers Education and Guidance; and from Autumn 2003, Careers Wales Online, an innovative interactive Website will be extensively piloted throughout schools and colleges.

9. As noted above, some of the most significant actions in our portfolio have been in the field of post 16 learning. The establishment of the National Council, on schedule following the Learning and Skills Act 2000, was a major step forward in the creation of a coherent structure for post 16 education. The Council has already done a great deal to make post 16 provision more learner focused; and its prospective new planning and funding arrangements, together with the development of CCETs into effective local catalysts of

improved service delivery, have the potential to transform provision in the years ahead. Here too the Committee's policy reviews have been notable - those for the Education and Training Action Plan and higher education, in particular. During the period of the Assembly and in creating our **new era for post 16 learning we have:**

- Set out a strategy for Higher Education in Wales : **"Reaching Higher**
- seen a four fold increase in the number of 5* departments in the 2001 **Research Assessment Exercise**
- supported widening access and participation: **HEIs** in Wales are already consistently outperforming UK averages in attracting a **wide social mix of students** and of working with groups and communities which are under-represented in higher education.6 Welsh HEIs were in the Times Higher Education Supplement **Access Elite** – those institutions who combined success at widening access with high standards of research and teaching. Assembly Government funding has supported the establishment **of four widening access partnerships** in Wales to take forward our objective of that all those with the ability and drive to benefit from HE have the opportunity to do so.
- **Launched Aimhigher Wales** – a project sponsored by NatWest designed to target young people and raise their awareness of and aspirations for HE.
- invested over £5m in **supporting reconfiguration projects**. *Reaching Higher* defines reconfiguration as a key development on which all future success of the sector must be built.
- **supported our FE colleges** so that last year Wales won 7 of the 30 Beacon Awards celebrating outstanding achievement across the FE sector in 2001. The Awards for 2002 have seen Coleg Llandrillo recognised for an honour for **the fifth year in succession** (a record shared by only **one other college** in England and Wales) and Pembrokeshire College for the second year running. A further six Welsh FE institutions were highly commended or short-listed for awards. And Deeside College has won the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education in recognition for its Commercial Services' activities in the provision of training for local and national businesses. This highly prestigious prize is awarded biannually to only a few colleges from 580 eligible institutions for projects that are judged to be important initiatives in their field and of world class standard. Clear evidence that standards and achievements in colleges in Wales are amongst the best in the UK.
- **Supported the National Council** in its first full year of operation so that in 2001-2002 it
 - fulfilled inherited ambitious targets for Further Education, Individual Learning Accounts, Modern Apprenticeships, the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults (MSDA) and Work-Based Learning for Adults.
 - **Expanded participation** saw with 235,800 students enrolled on further education courses in 2000/01 compared to 230,200 the previous year;

12,800 trainees on modern apprenticeships and the modern skills diploma for adults compared with 10,200 in November 2001

- started increased numbers of learners on work based learning with over 25,000 young people started up slightly on the target of 24,662;
- delivered 305 Innovation and Development Fund projects: introduced innovative work on, for example, Company Learning Accounts, Networks of Excellence, e-learning;
- launched a major strategic marketing campaign to raise demand for learning from individuals and employers and to develop a culture of lifelong learning;
- developed a 10-year Corporate Strategy and our first Corporate Plan, following one of the most comprehensive consultation processes ever undertaken by a public body in Wales,
- established four Regional Committees; developed first regional statements of needs and priorities; developed Memoranda of Understanding / action plans with our key partners, including HEFCW, WDA, Careers Wales, ACCAC, Estyn and Job Centre Plus;
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- Set in train a major initiative to bring **pay levels in the FE sector** into line with those in the schools sector in the interests of equity, retention and the maintenance of high standards.

10. Education and Training has been especially active in realising the Assembly's wider objectives. We have:

- established an advisory panel for education for **sustainable development** and produced guidance for schools and teachers on education for sustainable development and global citizenship.
- established Wales as a leading player in the field of **international co-operation in lifelong learning** through our membership of the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning and our bilateral Memoranda of Understanding with particular regions both in Europe and in North America and Australia.
- ensured that our policies above are aimed squarely at providing opportunities for all to promote **social inclusion**.

Conclusion

11. The Committee has a legacy paper commending future work to the Committee that will be established after the election. We brought about much together in the Assembly's first term. I believe that we can claim to have laid the foundation for a truly Learning Country for generations to come.

Current issues

12. A number of issues on which members sought information are covered at annexes **B, C, D and E**.