

Date: Thursday 17 July 2003

Time: 2.00pm

Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Members

Peter Black (Chair)
Jane Davidson (Minister)
Leighton Andrews
Jeff Cuthbert
David Davies
Mark Isherwood
Denise Idris Jones
Helen Mary Jones
Owen John Thomas

Constituency

South Wales West
Pontypridd
Rhondda
Caerphilly
Monmouth
North Wales
Conwy
Mid and West Wales
South West Central

Officials

Richard Davies
Alan Lansdown
Elizabeth Williams
Suzanne Chisholm
Lyn Hamilton
Michael Jones
Amanda Norman

Director, DfTE
Head, Pupil Support Division
Head, Youth Policy Team
Youth Policy Team
Higher Education Division

Committee Secretariat

Chris Reading
Holly Pembridge

Clerk
Deputy Clerk

Item One: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.
- 1.2 The Chair noted an apology from Irene James. There was no substitution.
- 1.3 There were no declarations of interest in accordance with standing order 4.5.

Item Two: Extending Entitlement
Paper: ELL(2) 03-03(p.1)

2.1 The Chair welcomed Elizabeth Williams and Suzanne Chisholm to the table. After a short introduction, the Chair invited Members to raise questions.

2.2 The following points were raised in response to Members' questions:

- Members broadly welcomed progress in implementing the Extending Entitlement agenda but in response to Members' concerns about multiplicity of partnerships and the subsequent strain on smaller, voluntary-led organisations, presenters explained that this was a valid concern. However, the Young People's Partnerships (YPPs) were a statutory requirement and still developing. As the YPPs became more established and people's trust grew, the YPPs would become the prime planning mechanism for services and support for 11-25 year olds. The input from the voluntary sector had been recognised with a one-off grant of £20,000. Further consideration in the future would be necessary as to how voluntary sector involvement might be sustained.
- The involvement of young people in decision-making was felt to be crucial and beneficial. The majority of YPPs had systems in place to obtain the views of a wide range of young people. Youth Forums were also felt to be a good platform for preparation of young people to usefully contribute. Presenters were sure that significant progress in this area would be made by March 2004. Helen Mary Jones asked for the next progress report to include guidance relating to how young people's involvement in appropriate public appointments' procedures might be increased along similar lines to those followed in appointing the Children's Commissioner.
- Jeff Cuthbert queried whether progress information had been received from Caerphilly YPP. It was confirmed that a further draft report had recently been received from Caerphilly YPP and that progress had been made.
- A range of providers and organisations were in discussion with YPPs about methods of accreditation and recognition of young people's achievements. These ranged from the Open College Network, records of achievement to sports and first aid qualifications.
- In terms of private sector involvement in YPPs, there was no statutory requirement for involvement. Many YPPs however, had their own networks outside of the YPP with bodies such as Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs). It was hoped that those involved in YPPs would view themselves as communicators with the wider communities. This would continue to be monitored.

- In response to the concern that many young people might not be aware of the existence of YPPs and possible duplication of services, presenters told the Committee that more needed to be done to raise awareness. The Committee would be kept informed of progress in due course.
- All local authorities were making commendable efforts to establish and develop YPPs. Some local authorities were more advanced in partnership working, others were new to this process but were making progress. Local authorities would be encouraged to share their experiences with one another.
- The overall central cost to the Assembly had been little so far. Funding had been allocated via special grant under Section 42. Elizabeth Williams undertook to provide a note to Committee outlining grants used to establish YPPs.
- YPPs were required to work with young people in auditing existing provision, its suitability, unmet need, available resources and to develop five-year strategies, which over time would influence provision. Every local authority in Wales had placed young people and children higher on their agendas than had previously been the case.
- Presenters stated that, whilst there was quantitative information available on the effectiveness of some programmes, qualitative evidence was equally important to measure the impact of "Extending Entitlement" in improving the quality of young people's lives. Interactive Feedback, a company supported by Swansea University would undertake an initial evaluation to establish a baseline against which progress would be measured.

Action Point

- **Elizabeth Williams to provide a note to the Chair outlining specific grants used for funding YPPs.**

Item Three: Foundation Phase

Paper: ELL(2) 03-03(p.2)

3.1 The Chair welcomed Susan Davies and Shan Richards to the meeting. They made a presentation using PowerPoint - which can be viewed at: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemmedlifelearn/content/03-03-paper2-present-e.pdf>

3.2 The Chair invited Members to ask questions and presenters gave the following responses:

- There had been greater take-up of early years teacher training positions since the advent of the Foundation Phase;
- In order to develop high-quality Welsh-medium teaching it was crucial to work with universities in supporting teaching staff. It was also important for schools to set their own targets in relation to Welsh-medium teaching;
- Teacher children ratios had been discussed in the seminars held as part of the consultation. The issue of teacher and support staff training was covered in the training needs' analysis. Mark Isherwood commented that teachers needed more empowerment, not more regulation;
- In relation to paragraph 4.6 of the paper (ELL(2) 03-03(p.2)), the Committee was told that 'a less content driven curriculum' meant that there would be a greater focus on developing pupils' skills;
- Mark Isherwood commented that the Foundation Phase was not a step change for most schools. The Minister responded that its introduction would improve standards in those schools who were currently performing below their potential;
- Work had been undertaken in close collaboration with the Chief Executive of Mudiad Ysgolion Meithrin, the Welsh Pre-Playgroups Association (WPPA) and the National Childminding Association (NCMA), concerning proposals allowing playgroups to access quality training;
- There would shortly be a common inspection framework for schools, which would focus on self-assessment. This would be a great opportunity for schools to influence and develop their own quality assurance systems;
- Some new schools were already planning for expansion. Other existing schools were planning to optimise the use of their existing space. Also more use of learning outdoors would be encouraged;
- Out of 19 questions on the consultation questionnaire, 13 were quantitative and 6 were qualitative. Some 359 responses had been received from schools.

3.3 The Chair thanked presenters for a very informative session.

Item Four: School Budget Forums
Paper: ELL(2) 03-03(p.3)

4.1 The Minister gave a brief introduction to the item and the following points were raised:

- The draft regulations before the Committee arose from the initial School Budget Forums consultation in March, copies of which had been provided to Committee Members;
- Work undertaken by the Audit Commission had demonstrated that schools and local government communicated effectively at present and there was much good practice to build on;
- The Education Act 2002 required local education authorities to advise the Assembly Government of school budgets by January 2004;
- Budget forums needed to be in place by 1 November 2003 to enable them to consider the 2004-2005 budget;
- Local authorities could not be required to have non-school members on the forums given the terms of Section 43 of the Education Act 2002 but would be encouraged to consider the benefits of doing so;
- The Minister wished to encourage the forums to plan for three-year indicative budgets; and
- The Minister undertook to report on the outcome of this consultation in the autumn term.

4.2 The Chair then invited Members to raise questions and the Minister gave the following responses:

- A rolling 10% of schools were usually consulted, in accordance with measures to reduce bureaucratic burdens on schools. The consultation on the draft regulations would be sent to the schools who had responded to the initial consultation, as they had expressed a particular interest in the topic;
- Prior to April 2004, any additional costs incurred by the existence of forums would be charged to the local schools budget. From 1 April 2004 onwards, any costs would be charged to the LEA budget;
- One Member was commented that there was a need for transparency over school funding by the National Assembly and LEAs and the Minister agreed.

- The Minister undertook to inform the Committee at the first meeting of the autumn term whether a regulatory appraisal would be carried out;
- In response to a question from Mark Isherwood, the Minister stated that schools and LEAs would be encouraged to include non-school members in the budget forums; and
- The Minister stated that the draft regulations did not specify whether budget forums should meet in public or in private and that forums should consider the issue. The Minister indicated that forums might need to meet in private in certain circumstances.

4.3 The Chair thanked the Minister and concluded discussion by asking Members to confirm that they were content with the timetable for the draft regulations. The Committee approved the draft regulations and the timetable for their implementation.

Action Point

- The Minister undertook to inform the Committee at the first meeting of the autumn term, whether a regulatory appraisal would be carried out.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Student Support and Higher Education

5.1 The Chair invited the Minister to make an announcement concerning student and HE funding in Wales. The Minister announced that it had been agreed that student support and HE funding in Wales would be devolved from the UK Government to the Welsh Assembly Government. A copy of the Cabinet Statement can be viewed at www.wales.gov.uk

5.2 The Minister made the following points:

- The existing student support mechanism would be transferred to the Welsh Assembly Government;
- Professor Teresa Rees had been appointed as Chair of an independent study of issues pertaining to the HE sector in Wales;
- The transfer of existing power would be on the basis of actual costs unrelated to the Barnett formula. The Welsh Assembly Government would meet the cost of not introducing top-up fees before 2006-07;
- Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales would not be charging fees, at least until 2006-07;
- Students from lower income backgrounds, entitled to the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG) would be able to study at an institution of their choice; and
- The Minister undertook to make a further statement in the autumn term.

Forward Work Programmes of Other Committees

5.3 The Chair asked for Members to send any comments on these forward work programmes to the Clerk. This matter would be discussed at the first party spokespersons' meeting in the autumn term.

Minutes

5.4 The Chair stated that the minutes of the meetings of 9th and 17th July would be circulated to Members for comment – before ratification at the first meeting in the autumn term.

WIHSC and SNAP Conference

5.5 The Committee agreed that Jeff Cuthbert should attend a conference in October organised by the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care (WIHSC) and SNAP Cymru entitled *Children who don't fit in*. Jeff Cuthbert undertook to submit a brief written report to Committee in due course.

Closing Remarks

5.6 The Chair wished Members a pleasant summer break and then closed the meeting.