

# Education and Lifelong Learning Committee ELL(2) 02-04(min)

## Minutes

**Date:** Wednesday 28 January 2004

**Time:** 9.15am - 12.30pm

**Venue:** Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

### Members

### Constituency

Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
Jane Davidson (Minister)	Pontypridd
Leighton Andrews	Rhondda
Jeff Cuthbert	Caerphilly
David Davies	Monmouth
Mark Isherwood	North Wales
Denise Idris Jones	Conwy
David Melding	South West Central (Present for Item Three)
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Owen John Thomas	South West Central

### Officials

Richard Davies	Group Director, Department for Training and Education
Elizabeth Taylor	Head, Schools Management Division
Alan Lansdown	Head, Pupil Support Division
Mair Watkins	Pupil Support Division
Judith Nedin	Central Support Unit
Neil Surman	HE Bill Team Manager
Lynne Hamilton	Higher Education Division,
Ruth Cox	Wales Office

### In Attendance:

Don Touhig MP	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales
Mike Bray	Assistant Director, National Children's Home Cymru
Janet Kelly	Head Occupational Therapist, Gwent NHS Trust

Liz McKinney	Speech and Language Therapist, Royal Alexandra Hospital, Rhyl
Wen Hayton	Principal Speech and Language Therapist, Royal Alexandra Hospital, Rhyl
Diane Evans	Primary Education Officer, Denbighshire

### **Committee Secretariat**

Chris Reading	Committee Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Committee Clerk
Ruth Hatton	Committee Support Officer

## **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 substitute.

1.3 Members of the Committee would be provided with a note of the information-gathering visit to two Bridgend schools. The Chair agreed with Jeff Cuthbert that it was important that Members attended these visits, wherever possible, as they were highly informative and valuable.

1.4 There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with Standing Order 4.5.

## **Item Two: Minister's Report**

### **Paper: ELL(2) 02-04(p.1) and Annexes**

2.1 The report was taken as read. The Chair invited Members to raise questions and the following issues were raised in discussion:

### **Secondary Legislation - The School Organisation Proposals by the National Council for Education and Training for Wales Regulations 2004**

2.2 In response to questions from Members, the Minister made the following points:

- The consultation period closed on 2 February 2004;
- The regulations would enable National Council-ELWa to make proposals for the reorganisation of sixth form provision in Wales. These powers had been derived from the Learning and Skills Act 2000;
- The consultation was mentioned in the Minister's report on 10 December;
- The consultation had been sent to a random 10% sample of schools in each LEA area, in accordance with the policy of reducing bureaucratic burdens on schools.

- There had been no requests to extend the consultation deadline;
- The Minister said that she was content to send out further consultation packs at the request of any Members.

2.3 The Committee resolved to consider the draft regulations at a future Committee meeting. Members would be invited to submit any proposed amendments to the Clerk in advance of the Committee meeting.

## **2.4 Professor Daugherty Assessment Review Group - Interim Report**

- The Minister informed the Committee that she would not be increasing assessment burdens in Wales and that accountability would be transparent;
- At Key Stage 2 (KS2), a new diagnostic test was proposed for the end of year five, which would focus on the child's ability;
- The interim report proposed the retention of teacher assessments at year six;
- The Minister would await statutory advice from ACCAC on the National Curriculum and its assessment later in the spring; and
- The Minister undertook to keep the Committee informed of developments.

## **2.5 Key Skills Qualifications**

- Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) had confirmed that it was content with these proposals;
- The removal of the tests had been warmly welcomed in Wales;
- There would be no implications for the Welsh Baccalaureate; and
- The removal of Key Skills' external tests would apply to Modern Apprenticeships in Wales.

## **2.6 Schools with a Religious Character**

- David Davies referred to a previous Assembly Question regarding a school that had not met its legal obligation to hold a morning assembly. David Davies asked if the Minister was satisfied that the school was now meeting its legal obligations. The Minister explained that Estyn reports determined whether schools were meeting their obligations and would assist the school in developing an action plan. The Minister stated that she was not aware of further evidence on this particular case but would provide a written response to David Davies on this matter.

## **2.7 Foundation Phase Pilots**

- In response to a question from a Member, the Minister undertook to provide a progress report to Committee in due course.

## **2.8 Iaith Pawb - Our Language**

- The Minister told the Committee that the rollout of the Iaith Pawb agenda was an exciting opportunity for Wales;
- £2m would cover training for teaching and support staff across Wales;
- There would be guidance on bringing the School Organisation Plans (SOPs) and Welsh education schemes closer together;
- An additional £400,000 funding to boost support for Welsh medium classroom materials and Welsh medium qualifications had been allocated for 2004-2005;
- Hadyn Edwards, Principal of Coleg Menai, was the lead official for ELWa concerning its role in the delivery of the Iaith Pawb agenda;
- Estyn was monitoring targets for adults learners of Welsh;
- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) was working closely with higher education institutions and had established a steering group to develop a strategy for the expansion of Welsh medium teaching and learning;
- The Minister stated that she would provide the Committee with a copy of the statement she made in Aberystwyth University relating to Welsh medium provision in higher education; and
- The Sector Skills Councils had acknowledged their obligations with regard to increasing work-based learning opportunities through the medium of Welsh. The Minister had invited the National Training Federation to advise her on this matter.

### **Item Three: Policy Review - Special Educational Needs**

**Papers: ELL(2) 02-04(p.2), (p.3) and (p.4)**

3.1 The Chair welcomed David Melding AM, Chair of the Health and Social Services Committee. The Chair also welcomed presenters to the meeting.

3.2 David Melding declared an interest as Chair of the governing body of Meadowbank Special School.

3.3 Mark Isherwood declared an interest as a parent of a child attending a Special Language Unit.

3.4 The following issues were raised in questions and discussion:

#### **Access to pre-school education/support**

3.5 Mike Bray said that it was helpful if health professionals identified SEN as early as possible. Joint working arrangements between agencies meant children could be identified as early as possible and that their needs would have been identified before they started school. It was often difficult for families to come to terms with their children's SEN. Funding from Cymorth had been helpful in drawing services together in the Caerphilly area. Respite care in the form of a sitter service, via social services was available for parents whose children had severe needs.

#### **Tribunals**

3.6 Janet Kelly said that she found it distressing during tribunals when in her professional capacity she was sometimes deemed to be opposing the local education authority (LEA).

## **Integrated Provision**

3.7 Janet Kelly said that integrated provision might entail establishing joint posts and referred to an example in the Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust. There was a need to give children and teachers a broad range of support. Due to a lack of professional capacity children had to be assessed on clinical priorities. During the holiday period there was less pressure on therapists, however, some holiday clubs were run in school holidays. Liz McKinney explained that she used some of her administration time to undertake initial assessment and after-school work. Janet Kelly stated that there were only 14 occupational therapy support staff throughout Wales. An all-Wales network of clinical occupational therapists had been established. This group had produced a report which would be provided for Members.

## **The Rhyl Project**

3.8 Diane Evans explained that the project based in Rhyl, funded by the Joint Flexibilities Grant, was aimed at primary schools. There had been a commitment from corporate directors to extend the project to the south of the county. This project did not meet the needs of pupils with more complex SEN but the LEA had other resources for this. The project did not cover secondary schools. The grant enabled the establishment of a BTEC course for learning support assistants and speech and language therapy assistants in a local college. Therapy assistants could deliver programmes designed by speech and language assistants. In Conwy, two nursery nurses had been seconded to the project and were about to be released back to the LEA. Members were shown graphs which evaluated the success of the project. Diane Evans undertook to provide copies of these graphs for Members.

## **SEN Statements**

3.9 Diane Evans explained that she was aiming to reduce the number of statements and that the intention was to use them for very specific provision. She stated that it was preferable to insert support at School Action Plus level.

## **Gwent Forum**

3.10 Janet Kelly said that a forum had recently been established including the health authority, LEA and health trust. It was too early to tell if the forum was reducing the amount of tribunals. Until the tensions surrounding prime and ultimate responsibility were resolved, the work of the forum would be slow and laborious. Mike Bray added that joint funding for agencies was helpful.

3.11 The Chair thanked the presenters for their interesting and informative contributions to the policy review.

## **Item Four: Higher Education Bill**

**Paper: ELL(2) 02-04(p.5)**

4.1 The Chair welcomed Don Touhig MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales. Don Touhig set out the key points of his briefing paper, making particular reference to the provisions of the Bill pertinent to Wales. The Chair invited questions from Members and the following issues were raised in discussion:

### **Debt**

4.2 Some Members were concerned that the perceived level of debt incurred by students under the new proposals would deter many students from entering higher education. Don Touhig said that a recent MORI poll did not support this claim. He stated that the Bill would give enabling powers to the National Assembly. The Welsh Assembly Government could then implement policies it felt were appropriate for Wales. Charles Clarke, the UK Secretary of State for Education and Skills had announced that a review would be undertaken after three years. Mr Touhig stated that proposals contained in the Bill would remove the burden of 'up-front' tuition fees.

### **Cross-border Inequalities**

4.3 There was some concern that the proposals in the Bill could create cross-border inequalities between England and Wales and also between England and Scotland. If variable fees were introduced in England but in neither Wales nor Scotland, then there could be a distortion in the market for higher education. Don Touhig stated that the UK Government and Welsh Assembly Government would continue discussions on means of addressing this potential problem.

### **Increased Participation in Higher Education**

4.4 Jane Davidson AM (Assembly Minister) said that it was important to make sure that Wales was perceived to be an attractive place to study. The Assembly could consider how devolved powers which the Bill would provide, could enable the Assembly to make higher education more attractive for potential students from poorer backgrounds.

### **Additional Income for Universities**

4.5 Don Touhig stated that the proposals in the Bill were expected to generate an extra £1 billion for universities.

### **Skills Base**

4.6 Don Touhig considered that it was vital that more young people from Wales should enter higher education to improve the skills base and enable Wales to compete effectively in a global market. He felt

that the proposals in the Bill would contribute towards this objective.

## **Alternative Measures for Funding**

4.7 Jane Davidson stated that the Bill would enable the Assembly to consider alternative approaches to variable fees and the provision of student support; for example, a graduate endowment scheme. The Assembly could make choices about student support and university funding systems in due course.

## **Professor Teresa Rees**

4.8 Jane Davidson stated that the independent review due to be undertaken by Professor Teresa Rees would assess key issues concerning student support. The Minister would take account of this advice before formulating policies for consideration by the National Assembly.

## **Variable Fees**

4.9 Some Members welcomed the proposed cap on variable fees but others felt it would create a market place in higher education. Don Touhig said that flexibility was important. In England the level of fees charged for different courses would be subject to agreement with the Office of Fair Access.

## **Repayment of Fees**

4.10 In response to a question from David Davies, Don Touhig stated that the salary threshold triggering the repayment of fees would be £15,000. The means by which this threshold would be reviewed and updated to take account of inflation would be covered in UK Government regulations, as it was a reserved matter for the UK Government.

## **Calculations for Entitlement**

4.11 David Davies asked whether changes in the family circumstances of a student applying for a grant would be taken into consideration in calculations. The Minister said that regarding entitlement, the principles of the proposed new system remained essentially the same as the existing system: fee remission would be calculated on a means-tested basis.

## **Collaboration with Business and Industry**

4.12 Some Members felt that it was important to consider ways in which business and local industry could contribute to the HE sector. Don Touhig agreed and said that links between the two sectors should be welcomed and encouraged.

4.13 The Chair thanked Don Touhig for attending the meeting and for explaining the proposals to the

Committee.

### **Item Five: Policy Review - School Transport**

**Paper: ELL(2) 02-04(p.6)**

5.1 The Chair asked the Committee to consider whether it wished to adopt the terms of reference and the timetable for the review set out in the paper. The Committee gave its assent. The Committee also gave approval for the Committee Clerk to make arrangements for the appointment of an expert adviser.

### **Item Six: Minutes of the previous meeting**

**Paper: ELL(2) 09-03(mins)**

6.1 The Committee ratified the minutes of the meeting of 10 December 2003. Leighton Andrews asked if the verbatim record of the item on National Council-ELWa's appearance was available. The Chair replied that it was available on the Intranet site.

The Committee noted the following paper:

### **Detailed Forward Work Programme**

**ELL(2) 02-04(p.7)**

### **Action Points**

- To include the scrutiny of the draft regulations: 'The School Organisation Proposals by the National Council for Education and Training for Wales Regulations 2004' in the programme for the summer term;
- The Minister to provide a copy of her statement made at Aberystwyth University, concerning Welsh medium provision in higher education;
- Janet Kelly to provide the Committee with a copy of the all-Wales network of clinical occupational therapists;
- Diane Evans to provide copies of the evaluation graphs shown to Members at the meeting; and
- Committee Clerk to make arrangements for the appointment of an expert adviser to assist the Committee with the review of school transport.