

# Education and Lifelong Learning

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Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Jane Davidson AM  
Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning  
Gweinidog dros Addysg a Dysgu Gydol-Oes

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Our Ref: MB/JD/0190/05

Mr Alun Cairns AM  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
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21<sup>st</sup> February 2005

Dear Alun,

During the debate in plenary 1 February 2005 on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's Review of Special Educational Needs Part 1: Early Identification and Intervention, I agreed to write to you about plans for speech, language and occupational therapists in Wales.

A review of workforce planning and the recruitment, training and retention of speech and language therapists has begun. In order to increase the numbers of speech and language therapists in Wales we are working with the universities to develop new programmes for training. We currently commission 40 places per year and the programme is run at the University of Wales Institute Cardiff. We are looking to

develop an additional programme in Wales and within this development we are exploring the option of a 2 year graduate programme and/or a provision in North Wales. Development will take place this year, with programme commencement aimed for 2006. In addition work is taking place to develop a training programme for speech and language therapy assistants which would enable them to undertake more complex work than at present and thus relieve the workload of therapists.

In order to meet an identified shortfall in the number of Occupational Therapists working in Wales and to address recruitment in mid and north Wales the University of Wales College of Medicine, University of Wales Bangor and North East Wales Institute at Wrexham have worked in partnership to develop additional training programmes. The result of this has been a new 4 year part time programme for Occupational Therapy in Wrexham ( first intake was September 2004) and two, 2 year accelerated (graduate entry) programmes in Cardiff and Bangor, which began in January 2005.

As mentioned in the Cabinet Written Statement in response to the review, "Working Together" a joint consultation document was issued by the Department for Training and Education and NHS Wales. The responses to this consultation are under consideration and will form the basis of guidance to LEAs and Local Health Services on the future delivery of speech and language services to children and young people aged 0-19 years across Wales. Its aim is to ensure that all professionals involved in the provision of such services, as well as the service users, parents, carers, and related voluntary organisations have an opportunity to comment on any proposed recommendations for change.

The report was generally well received and there was support (over 50% in agreement) to all the proposed recommendations. Amongst these is the desire for a National Communication Strategy developed to renew the emphasis that speech, language and communication plays in a child's development and the need for services to work together to resolve inequities in service delivery and develop appropriate mechanisms to address them.

Joint commissioning pilot projects are due to begin in April 2005. We have allocated £500,000 for 2005/06, 1m for 2006/07 and 1.5m for 2007/08 to provide support to LEAs in their contribution to the pooled budget.

We have also appointed a co-ordinator for speech and language services to establish these pilot projects and to ensure jointly commissioned services using a pooled budget approach as part of the Health Act 1999. This will ensure joint assessment and intervention teams operating across health and education and wherever possible intervention provided in schools. Priority will be given to statutory requirements of statements of SEN thus alleviating prime and ultimate responsibility difficulties. (This is to be a jointly funded post across Health and Education).

A National External Reference Group will be established. It will have an inaugural meeting in March 2005. The Group will monitor progress on the delivery of the recommendations and advise the Assembly on matters relating to speech, language and communication difficulties.

Finally the post of National Liaison Officer for Welsh Medium speech and language services is currently being advertised to work alongside the co-ordinator in developing Welsh medium services across Wales. We hope to make an appointment later in the spring.

I hope this is helpful,



Jane Davidson AM  
Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning