

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 13 DECEMBER 2000

This report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 8 November.

Annex D sets out my major engagements since the last report.

1. Student Hardship and Funding

This issued has already been raised in Committee on 15 and 29 November. On 5 December I made a statement in Plenary, in which I announced the draft terms of reference and membership of the Investigation Group on Student Hardship and Funding. In Plenary I gave an invitation to Assembly Members to contact me if they wanted to change the terms of reference substantially or felt that they did not address certain areas by lunchtime, Friday 8 December, so that I could discuss the terms with the group and bring a further report to this Committee. I discussed the terms with the Group at their first meeting on Friday and the revised terms of reference are at **Annex A**. The Group will begin its work on this basis. For convenience, I attach the list of members of the group at **Annex B**.

2. Welsh Baccalaureate

Preparations for the pilot of a Welsh Baccalaureate qualification are continuing. Letters seeking nominations for an official level steering group for the pilot have been sent to ACCAC, Estyn and the FEFCW. Terms of reference for the group and proposed timescales for the pilot are at **Annex C**.

In discussion Cabinet has decided to modify the commitment set out in the Partnership Agreement to remove the requirement to use the International Baccalaureate (IB) in the pilot. This decision was due to procurement requirements.

Procurement rules necessitate a specification to be drawn up for competition for the development of the pilot qualification. Tying the pilot qualification so closely to any particular existing model would militate against a level playing field for procurement. The specification needs to be neutral about how the successful contractor should achieve the aim of safeguarding the interests of students involved in the pilot.

3. **GEST : adjustments to allocations formula**

Following discussions about the GEST allocations formula at the last Committee meeting, I have asked officials to establish a small working group to examine the extent, and effects, of further changes which need to be made to address social deprivation issues. The group will include the WLGA and a small representative group of LEAs. As I indicated at our 29 November meeting, I shall be coming back to the Committee with the working group's recommendations in a few months time.

4. **Budgetary transfer**

Last month, the Deputy First Minister, the Minister for Finance and I jointly approved the transfer of that part of the budget for the Innovation and Technology Counselling Service - £400,000 – which currently resides within the Education and Training MEG to its correct position within the Economic Development MEG.

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Terms of reference

In www.betterwales.com the National Assembly for Wales has set its vision for the nation. One of our major themes is the development of an inclusive society where everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential. In further and higher education this means removing barriers to participation so that all who want to and can meet the challenges, are able to continue their education.

The document **Putting Wales First: A Partnership for the People of Wales** , amongst other matters, made the following commitment

"At the same time, we will institute an immediate independent investigation into the issue of student hardship and funding in Wales, dealing with those issues covered in the Scottish "Cubie Report" which fall within the Assembly's remit. The investigation will report on the options for tackling problems inherent in the current

system of student maintenance and support including those faced by mature students and those studying on a part-time basis. The investigation will address these issues within the context of the need to widen participation in Higher and Further Education, particularly from groups currently under-represented in the sectors. The investigation will be completed by the Spring of 2001".

This Partnership Agreement commits the partnership government to place the Report's recommendations before the Assembly and to provide sufficient money to fully fund implementation of the outcome from September 2001."

The investigation will, taking account of the powers of the National Assembly for Wales:

- consider the evidence on the extent of student hardship and the public perception of it ;
- assess the impact of the introduction of tuition fees on participation in higher education in Wales;
- consider whether there are any gaps in the emerging higher education student support system and identify possible interventions by the National Assembly ;
- take into account the diversity of the student body in both FE and HE, in terms of mode and level of study, mode of delivery, and address any particular needs of groups such as part-time and mature students;
- advise on the effective use of the increased resources which the National Assembly is making available for Access and Hardship Funds for students in further and higher education, that is ,plus £1.5 million in 2001-02 to £11.525 million; plus £2.0 million in 2002-03 to £12.025 million ; and plus £2.0 million in 2003-04 to £12.025 million.
- identify, having regard to the Assembly's proposed budget for Learning Maintenance Allowances to be introduced in 2002-03, what, if any, further intervention on student support in FE should be made, and cost proposals; and
- provide a report with recommendations and estimates of costs to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning by Easter 2001.

The Assembly would like the investigation to:

- review the data which is available on student income and expenditure eg the Student Income and Expenditure Survey (SIES) for 1998/99;
- review the information contained in the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales report "Participation rates for Welsh students in higher education within the UK during 1998/99";

review Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data on student completion rates to see what evidence exists on the relationship between non-completion rates and student finance;

- review any other appropriate statistical data; and

take evidence from the appropriate interest groups eg the groups representing students including young and adult learners, providers of education courses and representative bodies, the voluntary sector, childcare interests, equal opportunities interests , and disability interests.

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Members of Student Hardship and Funding Independent Investigation

Professor Teresa Rees Chair

Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, whose areas of expertise are equal opportunities, labour market policies and the European Union. Prior to her current appointment she was Professor of Labour Market Studies, University of Bristol. She is a member of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Rob Humphreys An academic in the Department of Continuing Education, University of Wales Swansea.

David Jenkins General

Secretary of the TUC Wales.

Dr Sonia Reynolds Member of
the Further Education
Funding Council for Wales.

Kenneth Richards A
academic economist,
University of Wales,
Aberystwyth.

Ray Singh A barrister at law,
a member of the Commission
for Racial Equality. A member
of the National Assembly
Advisory Group.

Ms Eleri Wynne Jones
Member of the Higher
Education Funding Council for
Wales. Director of Channel
Four Television 1986-90 and
member S4C Authority 1983-
90.

Matt Whiting President of the
University of Glamorgan
Students' Union, nominated
by NUS, Wales.

PILOT FOR A WELSH BACCALAUREATE:

1. Draft terms of reference for the steering group

The group will be responsible for advising Ministers on piloting a new qualification post 16 – the Welsh Baccalaureate. The broad objectives for the pilot will be to:

- meet the needs of a wide range of students in Wales;
- ensure breadth of study so that students can better meet the economic needs of Wales on leaving college;
- give parity to academic and vocational routes;
- cover appropriately the distinct culture and heritage of Wales; and,
- safeguard the interests of those students involved in the pilot.

Key tasks

The group should consider and advise on additional or revised objectives as necessary.

The group should draw up a specification and invitation to tender in for a pilot of the qualification at levels 2 and 3 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

The group should draw up a specification and invitation to tender for evaluation of the pilot.

The group should advise Ministers on the appointment of contractors to take forward this work.

The group should be responsible for establishing project groups as necessary to take forward the development work in partnership with the contractors.

2. Projected Timescale

Now – January 2001

Draw up specifications for the development of the qualification, and evaluation of the pilot.

January 2001 : Send out invitations to tender.

April/May 2001: Evaluate tenders and award contracts.

June 2001 – March 2002 : Contractor develops qualification. Pre-pilot evaluation.

March 2002 : Contractor submits qualification to ACCAC for accreditation.

September/October 2002 : Distribution of materials to the pilot centres.

September 2003 :First cohort of students commence pilot

September 2004 :Second cohort of students commence pilot

Summer 2005 : First cohort complete qualification

Summer 2006: Second cohort complete qualification

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Record of Official Commitments in Diary of Jane Davidson AM – From 4 December to 12 December.

5 December

Launch of Key Skills Support Programme

Launch of New Deal at Newport RFC

6 December

Meeting with D Jenkins, Wales Teacher Union Council

Meeting about Welsh National Opera

Meeting with NATFHE

7 December

Launch of Comenius

Launch of Skills & Learning Conference

Consul General of Ireland to Wales Mr Connor O'Riordan

8 December

Schools Heads Association Conference

Meeting with the WLGA

First Meeting of the Independent Review on Student Hardship

11 December

Meeting with Welsh Secondary Schools Association

Joint Launch with the Health and Social Services Minister of "Extending Entitlement" and "Children and Young People"

12 December

Meeting with Estyn