

Project Progress Report to
the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee of
the National Assembly for Wales
17th January 2001.

1.0 Background

The North Wales Special Educational Needs Regional Planning Project was established to identify the range of need and to coordinate the provision for youngsters with low incidence special educational needs in the North Wales local authorities of: Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd, Ynys Môn, and Wrexham on a regional basis.

As funding was under GEST arrangements, and the bid was submitted by the North Wales Local Education Authorities, the primary focus of the project concerns educational provision. However, it is recognised that other agencies, both statutory and non-statutory, are significant stakeholders in the spectrum of provision made for youngsters with low incidence special needs and all the relevant agencies are invited to contribute to and share the project where this is appropriate, and are represented on the Steering Group for the project.

2.0 Project Management

The project is co-ordinated on a day-to-day basis by the project co-ordinator, appointed from 1.4.2000, to October 2002. The project co-ordinator reports to the North Wales SEN Officer Group at their half-termly meetings in the first instance, and it is this group who decide the priorities and time scales for the different elements of the project, as submitted in the original bid, and reflected in the draft action plan.

2.1 Steering Committee

The project is monitored by a Steering Group (Appendix 3) representing Education, Health, Social Services, Voluntary Organisations and Parents. It is the role of the Steering Group to give the project a strategic steer, to ensure multi-agency interests are represented to monitor its progress, and to make recommendations to changes in service provision based on its findings. At its inaugural meeting (22.9.00) the Group appointed a Chairperson (G Edwards – SEN Officer, Wrexham), and a Vice Chair (R Prys, Voluntary Sector – Children's Society) to oversee matters and guide discussion. The Steering Group intends to meet termly, for which minutes and attendance are recorded

2.2 The Project Co-ordinator

In April 2000 the North Wales SEN Officer Group appointed a Project Co-ordinator (Gunars Grinvalds) seconded from his post of SEN Officer & Principal Educational Psychologist in Denbighshire LEA. The project is managed on a day to day basis by the co-ordinator who ensures that the Action Plan for the project is implemented. Duties include leading the project management and development, co-ordination of the various task groups, the collection and analysis of data, the preparation of reports based on findings to the Project Management Group, the Steering Group, and the National Assembly for Wales.

2.3 Task Groups

To date only one multi-agency Task Group has been established, looking at entry and exit criteria for early intervention programmes for youngsters with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. (Applied Behaviour Analysis – ABA, also known as Lovaas programmes).

Further task groups will be established on a phased basis to meet priorities as outlined in the Action Plan. Each group will have a specific remit in relation to the plan and will be reviewed regularly. The Task Groups will be asked to nominate a lead officer to co-ordinate the work of that group and action points are taken of each meeting.

The progress of each Task group is reported at the Management Group and Steering Group meetings. As the project develops there may be a need for cross task group representation

and this will need to be monitored to ensure that all groups are fairly represented and that undue burdens do not fall on individual members.

3.0 Action Plan

The project co-ordinator's initial task was to develop an action plan for the project based on the original bid. A conceptual map for this (Appendix 1) was presented to the Steering Group at its inaugural meeting and agreed in principle. The action plan has evolved from this but has not yet been approved in its entirety (Appendix 2). As the project progresses, further refinement and revisions will be made by the Management Group and the Steering Group.

4.0 Progress to Date

Priorities were initially set by the Management Group to investigate the prevalence of severe Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties, and then Autistic Spectrum disorder. The former was halted because of priority for the Autism survey in the context of one of the LEAs wishing to develop its specialist school for autism as a "regional centre of excellence". This development, set within a North Wales context of a range of provision and service development, has been supported by the Assembly for Wales,.

The survey on Autism and ABA has taken most of the project time to date, and two reports will be available shortly.

Progress made to date in the other areas identified in the Draft Project Action Plan, includes:

4.1. To raise the profile of the project

As reflected on the front sheet of this report, the logo and stationery was completed by May 2000, and the creation of a Web Site is currently being negotiated, with the intention of an initial trial version being ready by the end of February 2001.

Very few meetings have taken place to date to publicise the project, other than to parent groups of youngsters with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

There have been no requests from WAGSEN or ADEW for information on the North Wales Project.

4.2. To liaise with other Regional Projects

There is regular contact with the Gwent project, and communications have been established with some of the England projects, sharing information.

4.3. To complete a regional audit of low incidence special educational needs for:

- **Autism** - Data has been collected and analysed regarding need and incidence rates; initial report almost complete. ABA survey complete, and draft report ready for Management Group to consider.
- **Severe EBD** – initial data collected, but very patchy; due to be revisited shortly with clearer data demand.
- **Sensory Impairment** – survey to start once the Autism work is complete.

NOTE: Because data is being gathered sequentially for the different areas of need, the same obstacle of poorly organised data systems in the LEAs is encountered, generating a lot of work each time. There is a real need for LEAs to look at their data management systems, and to coordinate these. It has been suggested that this could perhaps be organised on a regional, or even National basis for Wales.

4.4. To audit all specialist provision (both schools and staff) in the region

Time scale to be agreed.

The Project Coordinator is collaborating with the Bangor University based project funded by the Welsh Language Board, investigating the need for Welsh medium SEN provision, and examples of good practice.

4.5. To co-ordinate regional liaison between Education, Social Services, Health, Voluntary and independent bodies,

The Task Group for ABA has been established, is well attended with representation from Health and Education, and about to expand to include the other agencies. Work is progressing well.

A new coordinator post is being jointly funded by Health Education and Social Services across

North Wales to look at more efficient joint funding mechanisms for those youngsters where this is required.

4.6. To audit existing databases in local authorities, health authorities and trusts, and elsewhere, which relate to pupils with SEN

To date this is only being done for Autism Spectrum Disorder, and the lists for checking are ready to be returned to the sources.

The Management Group and Steering Group will be invited by the Project Co-ordinator to consider a more strategic approach to data management and data sharing across authorities and agencies – considering lessons learnt from the Gwent Project.

4.7. To address regional recoupment and funding issues

Time scale to be agreed.

4.8. To co-ordinate an information database of local authority strategies to meet parallel or complementary initiatives in North Wales (e.g. Looked After Children, Sure Start, Children First)

Time scale to be agreed.

4.9. To explore European and other sources of funding to enable development of an SEN network in North Wales capable of meeting the needs of its SEN pupils.

Time scale to be agreed.

4.10. To support the regional development group for the training and management of Learning Support Assistants.

Time scale to be agreed.

4.11. To ensure mechanisms and structures are in place to continue with best practice following the completion of the project.

Time scale to be agreed.

5.0 Conclusion

The Project Co-ordinator, the Management Group and the Steering Group are committed to

the success of this project. The benefits of Regional Planning for Special Educational Needs is already becoming evident in terms of sharing ideas and practices on a multi agency basis, and between authorities.

Data management is an over-arching issue that needs to be addressed.

The time scale for the project will enable either, many areas to be addressed at a relatively superficial level – basic surveys, or, a few areas to be investigated in more depth. The Management Group and Steering Group need now to look carefully at what it is they wish to achieve in the life-span of this project, and reflect this in a revised Action Plan.

