

Chapter 3: Policy Context

Introduction

3.1 This Chapter is intended to provide an overview of the European, UK and Welsh policy context for EQUAL in Wales.

3.2 Following the transfer of specific devolved powers and responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Wales, to the National Assembly on 1 July 1999, the National Assembly has responsibility for developing and implementing policies which reflect the particular needs of the people of Wales. Wales remains part of the UK and primary legislation passed by the UK Government is applicable in Wales. The National Assembly has responsibility for education and training policy but employment policy is reserved to the UK Government, which takes the lead on employment legislation and has responsibility for the public employment service. This includes the funding and delivery of the New Deal and other Welfare to Work initiatives. In Wales, the UK Government is taking forward its Welfare to Work policies in partnership with the National Assembly and contributing Welsh organisations.

3.3 Employment strategy in Wales is based on three inter-linked objectives: increasing the supply of good quality jobs; improving the skills of the workforce; and helping into work those currently inactive in the labour market.

European Policy Context

3.4 The **European Employment Strategy** (EES) is laid down in the Employment Title of the Treaty of Amsterdam. Through a set of Employment Guidelines, the EES supports and guides Member States' work over the medium term towards combating unemployment, increasing employability and flexibility, improving the adaptability of the labour market, and improving gender equality in the workplace. The EES takes a non-regulatory approach to dealing with labour market issues, with action taken within its overall framework by Member States at national, regional and local levels according to their individual labour market needs and institutional structures.

3.5 Member States prepare Employment Action Plans on an annual basis and report upon progress to the Commission each year. These Plans in turn inform the Commission's Joint Employment Report and Council recommendations, and support peer reviews and exchange of best practice.

3.6 The main goals of the European Employment Strategy have been defined as:

- to achieve a high level of employment in the economy and for all groups in the labour

market

- to move away from a passive fight against unemployment towards promoting sustained employability and job creation
- to favour a new approach to work organisation in such a way that EU firms are able to cope with economic change while reconciling both security and adaptability, and allowing individuals to participate in life-long training
- to provide equal opportunities for everyone in the labour market to participate and have access to work.

The EES is founded on 22 Guidelines which fall under 4 Pillars :-

- improving employability
- developing entrepreneurship
- encouraging adaptability of businesses and their employees
- strengthening equal opportunities for women and men

3.7 The **UK Employment Action Plan** for Employment provides the national response to these guidelines and is prepared by the UK Government in consultation with the National Assembly for Wales and the other devolved administrations. It analyses the problems and challenges in the labour market and sets out key policy measures and initiatives which will be used to tackle them.

3.8 The **2000 Joint Employment Report** endorsed the UK's labour market policies and congratulated the UK on its healthy employment growth and low level of unemployment and high levels of employment for men and women. In the light of the report JER, the Council identified particular areas where increased emphasis would be valuable:

- improve the balance of policy implementation of the Guidelines, so as to strengthen and make more visible efforts to modernise work organisation, in particular by fostering social partnership at all appropriate levels.
- pursue efforts to reduce the gender pay gap and take action to improve childcare provision, with a view to making it easier for men and women with parental responsibilities to take employment. Special attention should be given to the needs of lone parents.
- reinforce active labour market policies for the adult unemployed before the 12 month point so as to increase the number of people benefiting from active measures, and supplement the support provided by the Jobseekers' Allowance Regime.
- intensify efforts to implement initiatives on life long learning, particularly those aimed at increasing the general level of basic skills, demonstrating how access will be ensured for

those groups traditionally reluctant to take up the opportunity, or unable to find suitable provision.

3.9 In 1997, the **Amsterdam Treaty** was agreed which expanded the scope of EU Equal Opportunities policy to include measures to combat discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

3.10 A new **EU Equal Treatment Directive** designed to outlaw discrimination against people at work on the grounds of their religion, age, disability or sexual orientation was agreed in Luxembourg in October 2000. A deadline of 2003 has been agreed for the provisions on religion and sexual orientation and 2006 for disability and the age discrimination laws.

3.11 In May 1999, the European Commission published a Communication, "**Towards a Europe for All Ages**" which stated that within the framework of the European Employment Strategy, the Commission is committed to promote policies which can secure adequate adaptation to the ageing of the labour force and to supporting the efforts of Member States with funding from the European Social Fund. For older workers support for active labour market policies to combat unemployment and prevent men and women from sliding into long-term unemployment is recognised as being of particular importance.

UK Policy Context

ESF Policy Frame of Reference

3.12 The **ESF Policy Frame of Reference** sets out the United Kingdom's policy for the use of all EU Structural Fund support for human resource development to promote employability and to develop human resources in all parts of the country for the period 2000-2006. The framework provides a planning tool and a policy rationale for Structural Fund support and guides partnerships in all parts of the UK to programme Structural Fund resources. The European Social Fund, and aspects of other EU Structural Funds, support the strategy set out in the UK National Action Plan for Employment. EQUAL will provide a useful means to test ideas which can be mainstreamed to other Structural Fund programmes and to help improve on the performance set out in the National Action Plan.

UK Employment Programmes

3.13 The UK Government sets the overall economic framework for high and stable levels of growth and employment. UK and National Assembly policies promote employment opportunities for all and focus on the need for a skilled, trained and adaptable labour force, and a flexible labour market, underpinned by basic minimum standards of fairness and decency. The UK Government and the National Assembly are particularly committed to helping young unemployed people and the long-term unemployed move from welfare to work and re-

engaging other welfare recipients with the labour market. A key element of this strategy is to make work pay, through policies such as the **National Minimum Wage** and the **Working Families Tax Credit**. Other tax and benefits reforms have also been introduced to make it easier for people to move from benefits into work such as **Job-Seekers Allowance, Restart interviews, Jobplan Workshops, Jobclubs, Work Trials and the Jobfinders Grant**.

3.14 The UK Government has introduced a wide range of employment and training programmes targeted on the long-term unemployed and other economically inactive client groups under the **New Deal** and other **Welfare to Work** initiatives. The following New Deal Initiatives operate in Wales - **New Deal for 18-24 year olds**, the **New Deal for 25 Plus**, the **New Deal 50 Plus**, the **New Deal for Partners**, the **New Deal for Lone Parents** and **New Deal for Disabled People**. The programmes are funded by the Department of Education and Employment but have been developed in Wales under the guidance of the Wales New Deal Task Force and are delivered through a network of local partnerships. The Assembly has a target to get 30,000 young people back to work under the New Deal.

UK Employment Legislation

3.15 The Government is supported in promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination by the **Equal Opportunities Commission** (EOC), the **Commission for Racial Equality** (CRE) and the **Disability Rights Commission** (DRC). Each Commission undertakes its own actions towards equality goals. All three organisations have offices in Wales and a regular dialogue with the National Assembly for Wales.

3.16 The Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment and its accompanying guidance set a standard for tackling age discrimination in employment, and is supported by advertising and publicity. An evaluation of the Code's impact will be published in 2001 and will inform future plans for legislation in this area. In addition, the Cabinet Office published a paper entitled, "**Winning the Generation Game**" which contains seventy five suggestions on how to combat age discrimination.

Welsh Policy Context

3.17 The principles of equal opportunity for all citizens and ensuring that no groups are excluded from society are central to both the National Assembly for Wales and UK Government policy, not least in relation to the labour market. These principles have been endorsed by the new **Partnership Government**. In line with the equality principles enshrined in the Amsterdam Treaty. **The Government of Wales Act 1998** commits the National Assembly to ensuring that the principle of equality of opportunity for all people is taken into consideration both in the exercise of its business and in carrying out its functions. As part of discharging its responsibility to equality of opportunity the National Assembly is seeking to mainstream equality across the board through the development of systems and structures with

particular regard to policy formulation, policy development and service delivery. An action plan is in place to take this forward which will ensure that mainstreaming is supported by specific actions such as the development of data baselines, the provision of equal opportunities awareness training across all aspects of the National Assembly's work and importantly working in close partnership with the equality agencies in Wales from both the statutory and voluntary sector. Another important feature of the **Government of Wales Act 1998** is the provision for the new WDA to have an extended role in the economic and social development of Wales.

3.18 In its first strategic plan "**Better Wales**", equal opportunities is identified alongside tackling social disadvantage and promoting sustainable development as one of the three major themes which will guide the work of the National Assembly.

3.19 **Better Wales** sets out a statement of values and principles which will influence the way the National Assembly will develop its policies, budgetary priorities and programmes over the coming years. Central to these values and principles is the promotion of a culture in which diversity is valued and equality of opportunity is a reality, and the development of an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. More specifically, the National Assembly is committed to:

- promoting equality of opportunity and tackling disadvantage;
- promoting a tolerant society in which diversity is valued;
- addressing the needs of all social groups, particularly the young, older people, disabled people and black and ethnic minorities;
- recognising the particular needs of rural areas and areas of social deprivation; and
- focusing efforts and resources on the problems of those most in need.

Better Wales also identifies five main areas for action:

- I. *Better opportunities for learning* – including action to open up lifelong learning opportunities for everyone; enabling more people with young families to work and increasing the participation of under-represented groups in learning and employment;
- II. *Better stronger economy* – including reducing unemployment and inactivity amongst groups which traditionally experience high levels of unemployment; breaking down barriers to self-employment and increasing opportunities through the social economy;
- III. *Better health and well being* – improving health and reducing health inequalities, including action to target the most disadvantaged communities;
- IV. *Better quality of life* – including helping people living in disadvantaged areas through community led action to develop confident communities, with decent housing, good local facilities, a high quality environment and free from crime and substance misuse; and
- V. *Better, simpler government* – including assessing all elements of the National Assembly's budget in terms of the contribution made to developing a more inclusive society; reviewing the performance of sponsored bodies in taking forward equal

opportunities policies and ensuring local government takes full account of equality issues; achieving greater diversity in public appointments and implementing family friendly policies.

3.20 The National Assembly recently published its first annual report outlining its equal opportunities arrangements under the terms of section 120 of the Government of Wales Act 1998. In addition, and to take forward its equality obligations in a coherent and consistent manner, it has established an **Equality Policy Unit**. The Unit is a general resource for all officials in the National Assembly, providing policy guidance and advice on equality issues.

3.21 The importance of equal opportunities to the National Assembly can be measured by the fact that it is only one of two standing committees with a remit spanning the whole of the Assembly functions. **The Committee on Equality of Opportunity's** remit is to ensure that the Assembly has effective arrangements in place to promote the principle of equality of opportunity for all people in the exercise of its functions and the conduct of its business.

3.22 Another major theme which has been identified by the National Assembly as a priority for action is **promoting social inclusion**.

3.23 The principle aims are to develop an inclusive society where everyone has the chance to fulfil their potential and the promotion of a culture in which diversity is valued and equality of opportunity is a reality.

3.24 The National Assembly also has direct responsibility for a range of policies and programmes which help to tackle social exclusion, integrate people into the labour market and to help people not currently active in the labour market to acquire the skills and motivation needed to obtain employment and progress in their careers. These are outlined below within the context of the 4 pillars of the European Employment Strategy:

I. Employability

3.25 The National Assembly will invest £81million over the three year period from 2001 to help some of the most deprived communities across Wales. This funding will support the following initiatives:-

- a. **Communities First** - in April 2000, the Assembly launched a consultation document on a new approach to community regeneration. The intention is to establish cross-sectoral and multi-agency methods of designing policy and local service delivery which directly involve the community in planning and delivering services. Communities First will sponsor the creation of partnerships and encourage the development of locally determined, innovative patterns of service delivery which cuts across the conventional divisions between education, health,

housing, training, employment planning and other services which impact on the well-being of individuals and their communities. It will target the most deprived areas in Wales. A second consultation document which will culminate in the selection of the communities to be targeted is expected to issue by the end of the year. The programme is expected to be launched in the Spring of 2001.

- b. The **People in Communities** programme aims to add value to other actions the Assembly is taking forward to tackle social exclusion. It is helping to determine what kind of action really works in excluded communities, where poverty and deprivation are concentrated. The programme is being implemented in eight communities across Wales. From 2001 the People in Communities programme will be incorporated into the Communities First programme.
- c. The **Children and Youth Partnership Fund** has been established to promote local initiatives to lift the educational attainment of young people; engage them in creative activities in their communities and to encourage them away from crime, drugs, vandalism and truancy. Projects are being delivered by local partnerships.

3.26 The **Youth Gateway** is a new scheme currently being piloted as a partnership between TECs and the Career Service to provide unfocused young people leaving school with in-depth assessment and guidance to ensure that they embark on a route which is suitable for them.

3.27 The **Adult Guidance Initiative** provides access to careers information and guidance to enable people to make effective choices about learning and career opportunities. Local networks are now well established drawing together local partners, including the Careers Service, Employment Service, Higher and Further Education Institutions and the Community Education and voluntary sectors. The networks provide free access to information and advice with referral to specialist guidance for the unemployed and economically inactive. Targets for 1999-00 are for 40,000 people to access information and advice and 10,500 to access guidance.

3.28 The provisions of the **Learning and Skills Act 2000** aims to ensure more efficient provision of post-16 education and training, informed by delivery plans drawn together by community consortia comprising local stakeholders in post-16 education and training. The Learning and Skills Act also includes new powers, which are unique to Wales, to improve support for young people. To implement these powers, the National Assembly's Policy unit has recently published a report '**Extending Entitlement: supporting young people in Wales**'. The report is intended to support a more integrated approach to support for young people aged 11-25 with the objective of promoting sustained and effective participation in education and training as well as health, well being and citizenship.

3.29 The **Youth Access Initiative** supports projects that help disengaged 14-17 year-olds, and those at risk of disengagement to enter employment, education or training. Action plans have been developed by local authorities and TECs to implement local solutions. These set out measures to contact disaffected young people; to assess their needs; develop their basic skills and personal effectiveness; and to integrate them into education, training or jobs. From April 2001, this is to be combined with the Children and Youth Partnership Fund.

3.30 The **Millennium Volunteers** initiative reflects the National Assembly's concern to promote a better society through combating social exclusion and encouraging active citizenship, starting with young people. The objectives of the programme are to:

- raise the numbers and extend the range of young people involved in volunteering;
- to assist in young people's personal development, enhance their skills and increase their employability;
- to develop community activity in poor neighbourhoods;
- increase the viability of community groups and the services they deliver; and
- to have a clear beneficial effect on local communities.

The scheme supports and encourages 16 -24 year olds to make a sustained commitment to volunteering on activities which will have an impact on the community.

I. **Adaptability**

3.31 **Lifelong Learning** - the National Assembly's stated policy is to establish Wales as a learning country, one which is renowned world-wide for its high standards of education and training.

3.32 The 1998 lifelong learning Green Paper for Wales '**Learning is For Everyone**', or *LIFE* as it is commonly known, took the first steps toward achieving this goal by setting out a blueprint for lifelong learning. It proposed a National Learning Strategy for Wales based on :-

- better access to information and provision
- new measures to increase and widen participation
- a single, flexible, credit-related qualifications framework spanning all learning post-16
- new targets for learning; and

- strengthening co-operation, collaboration and partnership at the local, regional and all-Wales levels.

3.33 The 1999 ***Education and Training Action Plan for Wales*** took up the philosophy of *LIFE* and turned it into achievable proposals. The Action Plan recommended modernising Wales' post-16 education and training systems through planning and providing in partnership. The aim is to promote new opportunities responsive to local need, widen choice and levels of participation, raise service standards, cut duplication and waste, and remove nugatory competition. Central to the new arrangements will be the establishment of a **National Council for Education and Training for Wales** together with its regional committees responsible for the funding of all post-16 education and training, excluding higher education. Local planning and delivery of post-16 education and training would fall within the remit of new Community Consortia for Education and Training.

3.34 The National Council for Education and Training for Wales will have a remit covering the whole of Wales. It will become operational from April 2001 and will assume the current strategic planning and funding responsibilities of the Further Education Funding Council for Wales and the four Welsh Training and Enterprise Councils. It will also have responsibility for funding community based learning and, in due course, post-16 education in schools. The National Council's total annual budget will be in the region of £400 million.

3.35 The Assembly has also agreed **National Targets for Education and Training** in Wales.

3.36 The National Assembly has endorsed the proposals for the establishment from April 2001 of an all-age guidance service - **Careers Wales**. Operating under a common brand, Careers Wales will draw together the Careers Service and the adult guidance networks. It would also provide the telephone helpline "learndirect" with access to both local and national data on learning opportunities.

3.37 A national careers information helpline – **learndirect** - is provided in partnership with the University for Industry (Ufi) from 4 call centres in Wales to link with local guidance networks.

3.38 The **University for Industry** (Ufi) is at the heart of the UK Government's Lifelong Learning agenda. The aims of the Ufi are to stimulate the demand for lifelong learning amongst business and

individuals and to promote the availability of and access to learning, particularly through the use of information and communication technologies. Ufl Ltd has established a Wales Advisory Group to advise on Welsh priorities and policies and to amplify the Ufl message throughout Wales. To achieve its aims Ufl Ltd intends to establish a network of Learning Centres across the UK in a variety of settings including libraries, colleges, shopping centres etc. The centres will be established through regional Learning Centre Hubs. There will be four Hubs in Wales coterminous with the Regional Economic Fora.

3.39 Basic Skills - The National Assembly, as part of the lifelong learning agenda, is supporting and funding key initiatives and policies which aim to turn round Wales' poor basic skills record. This is happening in partnership with the further education sector, the Basic Skills Agency and local authorities.

3.40 In 1998/99 the **Further Education Funding Council for Wales** (FEFCW) funded just over 15,000 enrolments on discrete basic skills programmes in further education institutions in Wales. In addition to delivery which takes place at main campus sites, FE institutions have seen basic skills programmes as one of the key areas to be taken forward through outreach development, particularly in the most socio-economically deprived communities (as identified by National Assembly indices). FEFCW research into current outreach provision offered by FE institutions in such communities has shown that basic skills programmes account for the largest category of course, and attract more students than any other type of programme.

3.41 In addition to discrete provision, FE institutions also deliver basic skills support to students on mainstream FE programmes. Institutions are currently required to spend a minimum of 50 per cent of funding secured through the Widening Participation factor at stage II of the funding methodology on basic skills support. In 1999/2000 this equated to £1.4 million. All institutions are being encouraged by the FEFCW to achieve the revised **Basic Skills Agency Quality Mark**, with its focus on strategic effectiveness. The Council is currently considering how its funding may be more effectively deployed to underpin this approach.

3.42 The Family Literacy Initiative is run by the Basic Skills Agency in partnership with all 22 Welsh local education authorities, their primary schools and further education colleges. A more recently introduced **Family Numeracy Initiative** is also underway. These two initiatives enable

children and their parents to study together, thus breaking down inter-generation barriers to learning. They concentrate on preventing failure early; attracting adults who have not participated in learning; working in areas where social exclusion is greatest and academic results are lowest; and developing effective and sustainable partnerships between schools, colleges and LEAs.

3.43 Employers have a key role in improving the skills of their employees, in order to support the new range of jobs being developed and so that their companies can become more competitive and successful. Employees, too, must increasingly take on more responsibility for improving their own skills. However, public interventions are needed in order to bring about the increased levels of skills development that are required if the objectives of this programme are to be met. The approach taken in Wales has been to take the necessary actions as a partnership between the social partners, central and local government and training and education providers.

3.44 Existing Assembly policies and programmes to improve skill levels in Wales include research and information provision to enable all partners to take the necessary actions; access to advice and guidance; a range of work-based training programmes for young people and adults; training initiatives specifically targeted at the small-firms sector; support for employers to collaborate on skills and training issues and support for the Investors in People programme.

3.45 The **Future Skills Wales** project, the results of which were published in March 1999, has provided important information concerning the need to increase the adaptability and employability of the workforce by raising skill levels, working alongside measures to promote equality of opportunity and better access to lifelong learning opportunities. A **Skills Unit** has been established to take forward further research on skills and to disseminate results. It will be located within the Council for Education and Training for Wales from April 2001. A **Skills Task Force** was established in December 1999 to take a strategic look at the results of the Future Skills Wales project, and submit a report to the Assembly with recommendations on further strategic actions that should be taken, to put Wales at the leading edge of economic development. This report was published in October 2000.

3.46 The Assembly is also encouraging employers and national training organisations in Wales to come together to set up Skills Sector Groups. Examples of current groups are the Wales Electronics Forum covering consumer electronics, semi-conductor, communications and IT; the

Automotive Forum; the South Wales Aerospace Group; and the Opto-electronics sector in North Wales. These groups can help plan skills and strategies for their sectors.

3.47 The goal of a dynamic and healthy SME sector in Wales depends to an important extent on the effective co-ordination and targeting of the wide range of support services. **Business Connect** provides a one-stop information and guidance service for SMEs. A new Business Connect Management Board was established in March 1998 to help provide better strategic direction to the business support network and to encourage a more co-ordinated approach. Key priorities include promoting better awareness among the business community of the services available from Business Connect partners and improving take-up. Continuous improvement in the quality of the services and in ensuring they remain relevant and client-focused are also important objectives. In 1999 over 23,000 business enquiries were received via the Business Connect helpline.

3.48 It is a strategic aim for the **HE and FE** sectors to contribute to the development of a skilled and well qualified workforce and the capacity for supporting the creation of wealth. Funding incentives have been provided to institutions to encourage them to develop their services and partnerships with industry, commerce and the public services. With the Welsh Development Agency the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales has established a joint initiative to support institutions' development of placement and other career-related programmes designed to improve graduate employability. Funding has been made available to encourage and reward institutions undertaking contract research, consultancy and training thereby encouraging closer links with industry and contributing to the future prosperity of Wales.

3.49 Within the framework which has been established institutions are encouraged and expected to contribute to the economic, social and welfare development of their region and the sector offers an extensive range of management, professional development and other courses for adult employees that are directly related to employees and workplace needs.

3.50 From 2000/01 the **Knowledge Exploitation Fund** (£34 million over 4 years) has been introduced to enable the HE and FE sectors to accelerate the exploitation of research and development, other knowledge and expertise within institutions, to contribute to wealth and job creation and economic development in Wales.

I. Entrepreneurship

3.51 The Assembly supports programmes which encourage entrepreneurship and the development of management skills in SMEs

3.52 In order to help foster a stronger enterprise culture in Wales a new **Entrepreneurship Action Plan** is being co-ordinated by the Welsh Development Agency via a Steering Group representing a wide range of key interests. Following extensive consultation the Plan is expected to be ready by Easter and is intended to provide a cohesive framework for action. The aim is for a fully cross-sectoral approach so we effectively nurture and support the wealth of talent in Welsh colleges, schools, local communities and the business sector. Wales' rate of new business formation is among the lowest among the regions of Europe. Implementation of the Plan should help secure the step change needed.

3.53 The **Business Start-up Programme**, managed by the Training and Enterprise Councils, aims to support the establishment of more good quality businesses which can survive and grow. Support offered includes help to develop a sound business plan, appropriate skills training and on-going mentoring support. The programme is open to all. In the current year it aims to assist 1,100 new ventures across Wales.

3.54 There are an estimated 160,000 sole traders in Wales. The aim of the **Sole Traders Initiative** - which is unique to Wales - is to help these micro-businesses to take on their first employee, thereby creating new employment and helping the businesses to expand. Since its launch in April 1998 an estimated 800 new jobs have been created under the Initiative.

3.56 A wide range of initiatives are under way in Wales to encourage closer links between SMEs and colleges. One of the main schemes is **Cymru Prosper Wales** which focuses on providing direct experience for students within small firms, via short term placements. The aim is to assist students in gaining first hand experience of small firms and to allow the companies see the benefits of utilising higher level skills. Over 450 firms are expected to participate in the scheme in the current year.

3.57 TECs also promote enterprise and business awareness through

their **Education Business Links** programmes. The aim is to provide all young people, while in compulsory education, with an opportunity to learn about business - with direct input from the business community.

3.58 The importance attached to developing the social economy in Wales was outlined in the **Pathways to Prosperity** document published in July 1998. The document recognises the valuable contribution which local, community initiatives can make to the wider economy of Wales and calls for development strategies to recognise their potential importance as an economic tool.

3.59 In accordance with the provisions of the Government of Wales Act 1998, as part of its business planning process the **new WDA** will be working with 'third sector' agencies to identify new and sustainable ways of achieving economic and social development through the social economy.

II. **Equal Opportunities for Women & Men**

3.60 Equality of opportunity for women means enabling them to overcome the particular barriers they face, to contribute fully to society and the economy and be able to achieve a rewarding and financially secure life. Not all women are parents; and many men are parents too. There are also carers to consider. It is important to ensure that women retain lifelong contact with the labour market where they wish to do so, break out of stereotypical employment roles and learn new skills. Women who register as unemployed and are available for work are given help in finding work on the same basis as men in a similar position.

3.61 The Assembly is working in partnership to take forward equal opportunities in employment in other ways. It supports **Chwarae Teg** ("Fair Play") which is a voluntary partnership body whose aim is to improve the position of women in the labour market. It does this in a number of ways including; advice and guidance to women entrepreneurs and managers; research and promotion activities; advising SMEs about gender policies; developing childcare and carer support measures. The Assembly is also a partner with the UK Government in the Work-Life Balance campaign to encourage employers to introduce employment policies which help their workforce to better balance their work and home responsibilities. One aspect of this campaign in Wales is a Work Life Balance Challenge Fund, to assist the development of relevant practices and policies in SMEs. The

Assembly is also developing a strategy for the support of carers, the majority of whom are women.

3.62 The Wales **European Equality Partnership** was launched in October 1997, comprising Chwarae Teg, WCVA, WDA, All Wales Ethnic Minority Association, WEFO, National Assembly for Wales, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the Commission for Racial Equality and Disability Wales. The partnerships main aim is the integration of equal opportunities into structural fund project development, approval and monitoring and to develop new measures to mainstream equal opportunities in the economic development of Wales.

3.63 The **National Childcare Strategy** in Wales is part of a United Kingdom-wide initiative. Its aim is to provide good quality, affordable childcare for children aged 0-14 in every neighbourhood in Wales. It is a key part of the Government's plans to promote social inclusion, to improve prospects, to give children a good start in life and to help them get the most out of education. It is also important to the Government's welfare reform programme and its aim of increasing the opportunities for parents, especially women to work or train.

3.64 The Strategy is being taken forward by **Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships** in each of the 22 local authority areas, who submitted their first childcare plans in 1999-2000. The partnerships are charged with ensuring that the £14.3m New Opportunities Fund grant monies for the creation of 22,000 out of school childcare places is fully utilised within the timescale set of 1999-2003. The latest information is that 8,600 places have been created and over some £1.9 million in grant awards have been made. Total funding from the Assembly in 2000-01 amounts to £2.3 million, of which £1.4 million is supports partnerships and the remaining £0.9 million is paid via training and enterprise councils (TECs) to the Chwarae Teg out of school care development team.

3.65 The **Children First Programme** aims to transform services for children in need, including children who are looked after by local authorities. Priorities are the introduction of new arrangements for young people moving on from the care system, ensuring that children in need and children looked after have the same life chances as other children, keeping children safe from harm and meeting the complex needs of disabled children. £5 million was made available to local authorities in 1999-2000 and the local government settlement for 2000-2001 included an additional £48 million for social services, with an expectation that one third would be

spent on children's services, primarily on Children First. The National Assembly's final budget for the next three years will earmark central funding for Children First of £12.2million, £16.3 million and £18.6 million.

The Welsh Language

3.66 Public policy in Wales is firmly behind the maintenance and promotion of Welsh and of its use in all areas of life. The 1993 Welsh Language Act enshrined the principle that Welsh and English 'should be treated on a basis of equality' in public business and in the administration of justice. The 1998 Government of Wales Act placed a similar requirement on the new National Assembly, and the Assembly has held its proceedings bilingually since its inception.

3.67 The Welsh Language Board (a public body accountable to the National Assembly) is charged with promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh. The Board pursues a wide range of initiatives. The Board has statutory powers to require public bodies to implement language schemes covering their use of Welsh. Over 100 schemes have been approved by the Board to date, and practical bilingualism is becoming a norm throughout the public services in Wales. There are no legal requirements on the private sector to use Welsh, but increasing numbers of companies are choosing to do so.