

ELL 02-01(p.2)

Education and Life-Long Learning Committee

FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATION POLICY IN WALES

Purpose

To invite the Committee to consider the following set of broad principles to underpin its approach to the development of education, training and life-long learning in Wales.

Recommendation

That the Committee comment upon the draft below. A final text for formal approval will be prepared in the light of those comments.

Timing

For consideration at the Committee meeting on 31 January 2001

Compliance

The paper is concerned with the general principles governing the National Assembly responsibilities. There are no issues of regularity or propriety associated with this paper. Its adoption would not have specific financial implications.

Cross-cutting Themes

The paper takes account of the impetus implicit in Better Wales; the principles paper adopted by the then Committee for children and Pre-16 Education; and the partnership schemes and frameworks appropriate to the further and higher education sectors, local government, the voluntary sector and business. It embraces the three major themes of :

- * sustainable development;
- * tackling social disadvantage; and
- * equality of opportunity.

Action for Subject Committee

The Subject Committee is invited to endorse the principles in the attached paper.

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The Essentials

The overall objective of the National Assembly as regards training and education, is to establish Wales as a learning country to the benefit of everyone who lives and works in Wales, whatever their circumstances, wherever they live, and regardless of age. It is axiomatic that:

- Training and education are equally and intimately related to successful community development, social inclusion, wealth creation, and personal fulfilment.
- Continuously improving knowledge, skills and understanding acquired through lifelong learning and better education and training opportunities for all must feature as a cardinal priority for the Assembly.
- To boost the options available to individuals and to enhance peoples' capacity to become adaptable and employable in the face of national and international technological change, every encouragement must be given to ensure that academic, technical and vocational learning routes have parity of esteem.
- The interests of learners override all others. Standards, results and outcomes matter more than inputs. All sectors must plan to achieve stretching but realistic targets, such as those set out in ETAP.
- High standards and expectations, and progressively improving outcomes, must feature for all learners, whatever their situation, and in all sectors.
- Barriers to learning must be recognised and steadily overcome to the benefit of learners' access and participation; support for diversity in communities; and wider opportunity and choice.
- Policy and programme interactions affecting individual sectors will be undertaken on the basis of partnership; effective advance consultation; the least possible bureaucracy; and at a level appropriate to the outcomes sought.
- Policy for lifelong learning will be applied in ways that reflect the distinctive needs and circumstances of Wales - taking full account of the functions and capacities of local government; the demonstrable willingness of employers to play a substantial part in supporting the development of well focused education and training in Wales; and the vital contributions of the voluntary sector.

- Equal opportunity, and support for bilingualism, must be sustained effectively.
- A Policy for education and training must be evidence based; openly reported on; provide firm foundations for knowledge exploitation and enterprise - not least in the application of European funding; and give clearer demonstrations of the quantitative and qualitative return on Assembly investment.

Key Themes

Although levels of attainment in Wales' schools have been improving over recent years at all levels, significant variations in attainment and performance remain between areas and schools in like situations. The levels of skill and qualification in the population as a whole, post-16, do not compare favourably with other parts of the UK or with those in major international competitors. This, combined with high levels of economic inactivity, represents a significant factor in Wales' poor economic performance and low levels of GDP. The Future Skills Wales project provided strong evidence of skills gaps and shortages. The Report of the Wales Skills Task Force emphasised the need to match supply across all learning groups, with the needs of employers.

As regards the pre-16 age range, policy in Wales should be devoted to raising standards of teaching and attainment. The purpose is to:

- Give **every child** a flying start in life.
- Develop progressively improving standards and **higher expectations** for every child at school in Wales, including those with special educational needs.
- Establish Wales as **an outstanding place in which to teach** as well as to learn.
- Ensure that **children facing special disadvantage** and **poverty of opportunity** - like children 'looked after' or at risk of exclusion - are better provided for.
- Put all school **buildings** in good physical shape supported by a strong **ICT** base, networked to museums, libraries and all the other resources that can make a success of learning at school.

In developing the agenda to promote lifelong learning the aim should be to:

- Increase **opportunities for all young people** and adults to contribute and achieve. This includes targeted financial support to encourage take-up of places at further and higher education or training and employment.
- Make sure that people can acquire the **skills** they need for employment and life. This includes tackling the basic skills deficit in Wales; lifting ICT competence;

meeting the generic skills needs identified in Future Skills Wales and the acquisition of softer 'key skills'.

- **Modernise the delivery of post-16 education and training.** This is being done through the Assembly's Education and Training Action Plan so as to bring coherence to our education and training system and overcome barriers to learning.
- **Maximise knowledge exploitation** - securing greater partnership between further and higher education and a stronger engagement between the sectors and the wider community to the benefit of wealth creation and social inclusion. At the same time, the research mission of higher education should be strongly enhanced.

The development of policy towards lifelong learning must also itself promote active citizenship, creativity and entrepreneurship. We look to:

- **Extend entitlement** - so that in every local authority area there is a well resourced and comprehensive system of advice and support available to all young people through Careers Wales.
- Generate the commitment to the value of **enterprise and entrepreneurship** without diminishing the pre-eminently important humane values of education in the round. This involves strong and vibrant partnerships between education and business to ensure that all young people have the opportunity to learn about enterprise and business; and so that more of our young people are awakened to the possibilities of pursuing self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Teaching

The importance of good teaching, and of the central role of teachers and lecturers should be explicitly affirmed. Much is asked of them - and they ask much of themselves. Their professional development, public recognition, and reward should be handled on terms that are both rigorous and constructive, not least as regards leadership, professional competence, and subject knowledge.

Information on achievement should be made openly and publicly available insofar as that is consistent with the confidentiality appropriate to individual pupils and students. The relevant data must be gathered to high standards and clear protocols that minimise the burdens on institutions, and should be presented in clear, balanced, and unambiguous format. The framework of annual assessments by teachers, and pupil tests; together with inspection and survey of schools, ITT, FE institutions, careers companies and work-based training, should be sustained and constructively focused in such a way as to enable sectors to build on strengths, overcome weaknesses, and avoid failure affecting learners' interests and life chances.

Partnership

Education and training must be supported by partnerships between schools, colleges, careers companies, parents, and the wider community and all those stakeholders with contributions to make to the benefit of learning outcomes. The contribution of parents, governors and local authority should be recognised and valued as critical to success in a learning country. Recognition is also appropriate for museums, libraries and other bodies responsible for promoting cultural and scientific understanding and for sustaining the lifelong learning agenda across the board.

Flexibility and Choice

Providers should construct their programmes so as to put them within reach of progressively increasing numbers of learners - in ways, at levels, and at times that are best suited to learners' needs. The new qualifications framework for post-16 education should be developed to ensure that a variety of options is available to meet needs flexibly and to take proper account of employers' requirements. Community consortia should play their full part in eradicating nugatory competition; making better use of resources; and extending the options available for learners.

For pre-16 the bulk of funding should be delegated to schools. They should have the elbow room they need to control how it is spent to achieve good educational outcomes, while being accountable for the use of resources, and for what they achieve. Retention of funding for centrally provided local education authority services for schools, should be consistent with assisting them, and their governing bodies, to secure improving outcomes for pupils over time.

Supply and Demand

As regards the economic impact of education and training, both rest on the supply side of the economy. They bear on peoples' ability to make their way in the world and the capacity of business to employ. But the lifelong learning agenda must take account of what happens on the demand side as well - including the work of the Economic Development Committee. Employment policy is not itself a devolved function and work in this field is heavily dependent on policies pursued by the UK Government for example on welfare reform (eg new deal); in Europe; and on employment policy. The cross-connections must be sustained effectively. The same is true for those arising in relation to developing strategies for children and young people - and the still wider work of the Health and Social Services Committee.