

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 14 NOVEMBER 2001

This report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 17 of October. **Annex A** sets out my major engagements since the last report.

1. Voluntary Partnership Council

On 15 October I had my second meeting, under the Voluntary Sector Scheme, with voluntary sector partners in education. Our first meeting was in March. At the meeting in October, we reported on the progress that had been made on the issues raised at the first meeting. We also held detailed discussions on:

- representation on the ELWa Board, Regional Committees and CCETs;
- the ELWa/Wales Council for Voluntary Action Conference on 6 July;
- Extending Entitlement;
- arrangements to be established between Careers Wales and the voluntary sector; and,
- the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.

I find these meetings very valuable. It is an excellent opportunity for me to gain an understanding of the concerns facing the voluntary sector and for solutions to be considered. I have also used these meetings to ask for suggestions on policy initiatives and to benefit from the extensive knowledge and experience of voluntary sector partners.

1. Pay for FE College lecturers

Since 1993 the governing body of each FE college in Wales, as in England, is an employer in its own right. They are represented by the Association of Colleges (AoC) for England and Wales, which together with the 7 FE trades unions, form the National Joint Forum (NJF). The NJF negotiates an annual pay recommendation which the AoC puts to individual colleges, as the employers, who may implement it or not. Government ministers in England and Wales have no locus in these arrangements. For 2001-02, the national recommendation is a pay award of 3.7 per cent.

Fforwm, the Association of FE colleges in Wales, is a local management/ employer organisation. Fforwm members are also members of the AoC. Neither Fforwm nor the

FE unions in Wales have any national negotiation rights on pay, although local bargaining between employers and trades unions can result in pay settlements at, above or below the NJC recommendation. This year Fforwm advised its members to use 4.25 per cent as a baseline figure in coming to a view on pay increases for staff.

Currently, 96 per cent (23 of 24) of colleges in Wales have agreed to meet or better the national recommendation - the range is 3.7 to 6 per cent, with 18 colleges (78 per cent) meeting or bettering Fforwm's advice.

The National Council - ELWa's budget for 2001-02 places sufficient aggregate funding in the post-16 education and training sectors to help cover pay pressures in FE colleges across the board. In addition, the Assembly provided an extra £3.17m for pay in May to the colleges in parity with additional money being provided in England, outside the pay settlement. At the time, I said "The Assembly could expect each institution to determine, in negotiation, a pay settlement for its staff which is fair, equitable and affordable".

I have had meetings during the last few days with the trades unions and Fforwm. In the light of the representations made, I shall be asking the National Council - ELWa to give me advice on ways to improve standards and performance amongst post-16 providers, especially as regards human resources policy and personnel practice.

2. Tests for 7 year olds

I announced on Thursday 1st November that, having received overwhelming support for the proposal, the national tests at the end of Key Stage 1 would be scrapped with immediate effect. 7-year-olds in Wales will not be tested in 2002. This will immediately reduce the administrative burden on primary school teachers and release more time for other classroom activities. It was important that an early decision and announcement was made to remove any confusion in schools and teachers can now plan activities for the remainder of the year knowing that the tests and tasks will not be mandatory. The tests and tasks which have been developed by ACCAC will not be wasted. The material will be distributed to schools for optional use to support classroom activities and teacher assessments – which of course remain statutory. This seems the most sensible approach for next year and is very much in tune with the views of the majority of those who contributed to the consultation.

3. Individual Learning Accounts

The Committee may be aware of the serious problems encountered by the Individual Learning Account (ILA) scheme in England, resulting in the Secretary of State for Education and Skills deciding to cease the operation of ILAs in England. The decision follows concerns regarding incidences of training provider malpractice and a greater

than anticipated demand resulting in a significant forecast overspend.

My officials and the other devolved administrations have been monitoring the situation closely and I am satisfied that we have made the right decision to continue with the ILA scheme in Wales. There are important differences in the operation of ILAs in Wales compared to England, the most significant of which was our decision to award the contract for delivery to the National Council – ELWa. The fact that there have been no reported incidents of fraud and both outputs and costs of the scheme remain on target, is testament to the National Council – ELWa’s robust management procedures.

We have asked for assurances from the National Council – ELWa that they will step up audit procedures and reinforce their quality controls so that the problems encountered in England are not replicated here. To this end, I have asked the National Council – ELWa to temporarily suspend the registration of new learning providers as I am particularly keen that those who have been operating outside the ethos of ILAs in England, are not allowed to turn their attention to Wales as an alternative source of opportunist income, generated by introducing their dubious practices here.

Overall, ILAs have been a huge success in Wales with over 60,000 people currently members of the scheme and early evaluation indicating that 92% are very positive about their ILA supported training.

I will keep the Committee updated.

4. Initial teacher training grants

I confirmed on 1 November that all eligible trainees following postgraduate initial teacher training courses in Wales, starting in September 2002, would receive a training grant of £6,000. A £6,000 training grant is available to all eligible students starting their postgraduate teacher training courses leading to Qualified Teacher Status in 2001-02. Eligible trainees who qualify and go on to teach in secondary mathematics, science, information technology, design technology, modern foreign languages or Welsh will also be entitled to a £4,000 teaching incentive following the successful completion of their first year of teaching in qualifying posts.

I announced in November last year that the £6,000 incentive payments will be available during training to secondary postgraduate trainees up to and including at least the 2003-04 academic year. The incentive payments for primary postgraduate trainees were initially offered for the 2001-02 academic year only. This was the position in England also.

This announcement extends the availability of the £6,000 incentives to primary

postgraduate trainees for a further academic year in line with the Partnership Agreement. It will help us to attract the best quality, highly committed students to Wales and will enable teacher training providers in Wales to continue to compete effectively for the most talented applicants.

5. **Math.Cymru.**

The end of year conference for Math 2000 set out an ambitious agenda for further action to raise standards and promote mathematics to young people. To address this I have agreed that Techniquest be invited to continue the central co-ordinating role undertaken for Maths2000. In particular, Techniquest will work with local education authorities and schools to promote maths through a series of local and national initiatives and events. This will include support for a national maths week and development of materials and activities for use with young people. Attention will also be given to the provision of support for the ongoing professional development of maths teachers.

Much of this work will be led by a national co-ordinator to be appointed by Techniquest. The post has been advertised and an appointment is expected by the end of November. The co-ordinator will work to a steering group drawing together representatives from ACCAC, Estyn, NAFW, the Basic Skills Agency and the local authority maths advisers.

7. **Wales Science Year**

I helped launch Science Year in Wales at Techniquest in September where more than 200 schoolchildren joined in the events such as the 'Giant Jump' and 'Big Shout' - experiments designed to show that science can be fun and everyone can get involved. It was an excellent way to show the positive impact of science and are examples of how we can help get more young people interested in pursuing a career in science.

Techniquest are managing Wales Science Year on behalf of the Assembly and they have recently recruited Sue Cavell as National Co-ordinator.

The co-ordinator will be working closely with the Wales Science Year Steering Group which is drawn from key organisations such as the National Assembly for Wales, ESTYN, ELWa, Science Advisory Service and the Association for Science Education. A Communications Group is also being formed from a number of interested organisations to help share information and to help disseminate news about Science Year.. The Co-ordinator will be pulling details of the huge number of science events, projects and activities already going on all over Wales together into a comprehensive calendar of events and will "badge" them to Wales Science Year, raising the profile of each one and adding to the overall effect of WSY.

Last week all maintained secondary school in Wales received an Intel Computer Microscope free – funding was provided by the Assembly

Guidance and application forms for organisations to apply for grant funding of science projects are being released on the Wales Science Year website on Monday: <http://www.walescienceyear.org.uk/>. Secondary and SEN schools will be invited to apply for School Science Year project grants of up to £750 each, which can go towards visits or any relevant science initiative. Primary Schools are also encouraged to take part in projects by combining with their associated Secondary Schools. Other publicly funded organisations including FE and HE organisations will be able to bid for funding up to £5,000. A Project sub group has been set up to deal with the applications from organisations and will begin assessing bids in December.

A complimentary copy of the first Science Year CDROM entitled "Who am I?" was provided for all secondary schools. The CDROM was produced by the Association for Science Education and there will be several others in the series during the year.

6. **Secondary Schools Results**

On Monday we announced details of the best ever secondary schools results for Wales with half of students achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grade C or above or the equivalent. I should like to congratulate pupils and teachers on another fine performance. Further details are contained in *SDR55/2001- GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A, AS and Advanced GNVQ Results in Wales 2000/01* and in the press release:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/newsite.dbs?37E752F2000942E000000A2E0000000+current+3BEF9A120009C7BB0000684600000000>

ANNEX A

Minister's Engagements from 17 October 2001 – 13 November 2001

17 October

Speech – NACRO Cymru Conference

Visit – Wales Digital College

Speech - Cardiff Business School Undergraduate Prizes

18 October

Speech – Association of Educational Psychologists Annual Course

Event – Judging of the Encee Systems Christmas Card Competition

Speech – Menter Iaith AGM

20 October

Speech – Welsh Scout Council Conference

22 October

Speech - GWERIN

Visit - XL Wales Family Technology Centre, Swansea

Speech & Dinner - Learning Country

23 October

Meeting - Professor Tomlinson

24 October

NEDS Press Conference

25 October

Launch - Education Working Party Report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry

29 October

Meeting - ELWa in St Asaph's

Reception at No 10, Downing Street

30 October

Meeting - Managing Behaviour at Brangwyn Hall, Swansea

Awards Presentation - UK Top Female Computing Awards - Hanover International Hotel, Cardiff

Speech - Wales Youth Agency Excellence Awards at NCM, Cardiff Bay

31 October 2001

Meeting – UCET

Meeting – Susan Lewis, HM Chief Inspector

1 November

Speech - SEO Conference at Hotel Metropole, Llandrindod Wells

Dinner - WDA "Eureka" at Celtic Manor

3 November

Speech - Carmarthenshire Youth Conference

7 November

Speech – Skills Conference

8 November

Meeting - NATFHE

12 November

Visit - World Wide Wales, Ebbw Vale

Speech - WSSA/WPSA Conference, University of Glamorgan

Meeting - Fforwm

13 November

Meeting - UNISON

Meeting - Penyrheol Comprehensive School Pupils