

## EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

### ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 16 JANUARY 2002

This report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 12 of December. **Annex A** sets out my major engagements since the last report.

#### 1. **European Year of Languages and the National Languages Strategy**

Last term brought the European Year of Languages 2001 to a close, with a number of schools and colleges across Wales arranging activities to mark the Year. Notable events included a 'European Fun Challenge' organised by 6 comprehensive schools in Carmarthenshire; an evening of European entertainment at Olchfa School, Swansea, and a week of languages activity at Blackwood School. Cyfarthfa School in Merthyr Tydfil was successful in attracting EU funding to celebrate the Year, and the school is taking forward an exciting project which includes re-forging links with countries from which people have emigrated to Merthyr in the past.

Work on the Assembly Government's National Languages Strategy is now almost complete. The 36 responses received to our consultation earlier in 2001 have been analysed, and a final strategy document is being prepared. This will be tabled for debate in Plenary.

One of the key planks of the strategy is the establishment of a Welsh arm of the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT). Work to establish this new resource – CILT Cymru - is well underway, and we expect it to be operational from the beginning of the new financial year. CILT Cymru will play a key role in promoting and developing the teaching of modern foreign languages.

#### 2. **Disaffection**

##### **Context**

In the past few years the effects of behaviour in school and the link between disaffection and underachievement, have become increasingly prominent issues. Although there has been a reduction in the number of permanent exclusions in Wales, down from 473 in 1996/97 to 337 in 1999/00, there has also been a rise in teacher challenges to exclusion appeal decisions. In

addition there is now substantial research illustrating the poor prospects for those who are permanently excluded from school. This exclusion often marks the beginning of a downward spiral leading to wider social exclusion and involvement with drugs and crime.

## **Conference**

The National Assembly Training and Education Department hosted a conference on 'Tackling Disaffection Together' on 30-31<sup>st</sup> October in Swansea. The aim of the conference was to enable the policy makers and practitioners to critically examine the Assembly's existing guidance on Pupil Support and Social Inclusion, to speak frankly about its strengths and shortcomings, to identify good practice and to agree ways in which greater multi-agency working can be achieved. There were several high profile speakers and thought-provoking presentations from contributors including Chief Inspector Susan Lewis of Estyn; David Moore of HMI, London; Prof. Ken Reid of Swansea Institute of Higher Education; Mark Provis, of INCLUDE; Peter Clarke, the Children's Commissioner for Wales; John Birch, Assistant Chief Inspector from Northern Ireland and Mal Davies, Head of Willows High School in Cardiff.

The presentations included challenging statistics on the impacts of disaffection, the importance of early intervention, and successful practice in providing an 'alternative curriculum'. The importance of educational inclusion for schools to be effective was also explored as well as the reasons behind disaffection and disengagement from the system, and the need for positive staff approaches to managing behaviour and learning. Other UK perspectives were extremely valuable, along with the understanding of how these problems are set in the wider context of society and employment circumstances. Many of these issues cannot be tackled in isolation and require the input and help of different agencies. In addition schools need to work closely with pupils and their homes.

Representatives from schools and projects organised by voluntary organisations demonstrated that there is already much good practice in operation in Wales. The young person's perspective was provided by a group of young people themselves.

The conference was attended by around 200 delegates, including teachers, head teachers, representatives from local education authorities and voluntary organisations. Workshop sessions were held in the afternoons and there was much productive and positive discussion. The facilitators of the groups have been reviewing the notes of the group discussions, but some of the main themes which have been emerging have included the following:

- The need to recognise behaviour patterns and to teach pupils the appropriate behaviour

skills to enable them to learn.

- The current deficit in teacher training in how to manage behaviour.
- A call for more consistent and longer-term funding in tackling these issues.
- A need to share the information and good practice that already exists .
- The need to value achievements more widely (not just the number of A-C GCSEs) and create greater scope for a more flexible curriculum.
- The importance of reducing absence, whether authorised or not.

## **Future Plans**

The discussions and themes of the conference are currently being evaluated and will shortly be put back to the conference delegates for their views. Following this an action plan will be finalised by the end of Spring next year. This may involve the setting up of a number of task and finish groups to consider some of the particular areas in detail. The guidance in Circular 3/99 may also need to be reviewed in light of these considerations. The conference has already been a valuable forum for exchanging information and experiences in dealing with disaffection, both in schools and through alternative provision. Further promotion of this sharing of approaches across Wales and between local authorities will also be a priority. Funding has earmarked for the next financial year to enable the identification of and support of pilot projects around the key theme areas above. how much ?

## **3. Appointment of a Chief Inspector, Estyn.**

The Chief Inspector of Education and Training, Susan Lewis, was initially appointed for five years with the possibility of renewal. This is consistent with provision in the School Inspections Act, 1996 and best practice in employment law. The Chief Inspector's term of office ends on 31 May and there is, therefore, a contractual obligation that she alone be offered the opportunity to be considered for a further term. Likewise there is an obligation that an appropriate review be undertaken and, depending on the outcome, reappointment as Chief Inspector may be offered. If, as a result of the review, a recommendation was brought forward not to reappoint, then action would be taken to fill the post through open competition. The Chief Inspector has confirmed that she wishes to be considered for a further term of office and arrangements have been put in hand for an appropriate performance review with the Secretary of State's concurrence

Contrary to ill informed comment in the media, there is no secrecy surrounding the composition of the review panel. The panel will be chaired by the Assembly's Senior Director, Social Policy and Local Government Affairs, George Craig, supported by Professor H R Evans, Vice Chancellor, University of Wales, Bangor and Rudi Plaut, Chairman of Northmace Ltd. The panel provides assurance of independence and experience. It is charged with providing an informed and unprejudiced view on the Chief Inspector's performance to date and her ability to meet the requirements of the role from June 2002 onwards. The panel's recommendation will

form the basis for the advice to the Secretary of State. The final decision, of course, will be for the Privy Council. If reappointment is recommended it is anticipated that the matter will be considered at the March meeting of the Privy Council.

#### **4. Review of Advanced Level Qualifications / Curriculum 2000**

On 18 December I announced the outcomes of the review of Advanced Level qualifications. The review confirmed the widespread support for the principles underlying the changes that were introduced in September 2000. Moreover, there was evidence that schools and colleges adapting to the revised qualifications. The measures I announced in September midway through the review are having a positive effect. Of course, we will continue to seek to make improvements, that is an ongoing process.

The results in the Summer 2001 examinations were very encouraging and were a testament to the hard work of students and staff in our schools and colleges. The measures I have announced will help to build on this, as the new qualifications bed down.

One area where it is clear that there have been particular problems is AS Mathematics. The specifications for AS Mathematics will be revised carefully to ensure that the content is manageable, without loss of rigour. Meanwhile measures will be put in place to help students working to the existing specifications.

I am particularly pleased that the new qualifications are settling down well and that the principles underlying the changes have widespread support. This is also good news for the Assembly Government's project to develop a Welsh Baccalaureate, as the WJEC's model is based on the revised qualifications.

#### **5. Individual Learning Accounts**

The committee were advised by letter on 21 December of the decision to suspend the ILA programme in Wales. Application for new membership was suspended at midnight on 21 December. The ILA programme in England and N. Ireland was withdrawn (and suspended in Scotland) in November as a result of allegations of fraud, theft and unauthorised access to the ILA computer system managed by Capita.

There had been growing concerns about some unscrupulous activity in Wales by some marketing companies and Learning Providers. Initially, the National Council considered that it had the necessary measures in place to deal with such activities and that it had quantified the exposure to risk. However in view of the suspected scale of fraud in England and the increased vulnerability of Wales now that the scheme had closed in all parts of the UK in late December the National Council's Accounting Officer's recommendation that the programme should be suspended to fully assess the operation of ILAs was accepted.

The Council will honour applications for learning that were waiting clearance before the suspension became effective. Learners who have not fully utilised their £150 ILA will have 6 weeks to choose some learning and then 6 months to use the remainder of their ILA. All outstanding legitimate payments to learning providers will be processed. During this period of suspension the National Council will undertake a full evaluation of the programme as well as assessing that the necessary controls and systems are in place to deal with any unscrupulous Learning Provider. A temporary suspension will allow time for the development of a successor scheme that is even more cost effective and resistant to abuse.

## **Annex A**

### **Minister's Engagements from 11 December 2001 – 15 January 2002**

#### **11 December**

Launch – Shelter Cymru

#### **12 December**

Speech – Equal Opportunities Guidance Launch

#### **13 December**

Meeting - Unions

#### **14 December**

Meeting – Voluntary Sector Partnership Council

#### **17 December**

Meeting – ELWa

### **18 December**

Visit – Community Learning & Enterprise Centre

Visit – Trinity College

Launch – SEN Code of Practice

### **19 December**

Presentation – Caldicot Comprehensive School

### **7 January 2002**

Meeting – Prime Minister’s devolution adviser

### **8 January 2002**

Meeting – Chair ELL

### **9 January 2002**

Visit – Rofft Comprehensive School, Wrexham

Launch – official opening of the Profound & Multiple Learning Centre

Visit – Yale College

Meeting – Wrexham CCET

Visit – Wrexham Homework Clubs

## **10 January**

Meeting – Minister Bligh

Meeting – Narrowing the Gap

Meeting – Chwarae Teg

## **14 January**

Meeting – Estyn

Meeting – Don Touhig

Visit – Techniquet

Presentation – Investors in People Award