

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 24 APRIL 2002.

This report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 20 March 2002. **Annex A** sets out my major engagements since the last report.

1. PRIMARY LEGISLATION 2002-03; NEW EDUCATION BILL

Each year in March the National Assembly has the opportunity under Standing Orders to discuss and debate proposals for primary legislation for Wales. This debate, a key part of the settlement in accordance with the Government of Wales Act 1998, took place in Plenary on March 19th. The proposals this year included an Education Wales Bill. This would strengthen the Assembly's ability to implement proposals in the education paving document, *The Learning Country*, by extending statutory force to a range of policies currently implemented administratively.

Under the proposal a Bill would give the Assembly the powers to implement the Rees Report on student hardship with an explicit power to pay grants to students in higher and further education, thus it would give a firmer legislative base to our Assembly Learning Grants and ensure that local authorities continued to implement this important policy. Taking account of progress on reconfiguration under "*Reaching Higher* ", it could give a statutory planning function to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and require HEFCW to plan coherently with the National Council. This would complete the integration of education and training in Wales begun by the Learning and Skills Act 1999. It would be possible to extend the current statutory limit on infant classes to junior classes too.

2. PROGRESS OF THE NARROWING THE GAP TASK GROUP

The Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Local Government Association have been concerned that although there has been significant success in improving educational attainment overall, the gap between schools – notably those serving similar socio-economic areas - has not narrowed. The Partnership Council established a task group in October 2001, to look at the range of performance of schools with a view to making recommendations for action. This group has drawn its membership from the WLGA, the National Assembly, Estyn, the Association of Directors of Education in Wales, Governors Wales, the teaching unions, the Welsh Primary Schools Association, the Welsh Secondary Schools Association, GTC Wales, ACCAC and ELWA.

The remit given to the task group was to:

- identify the factors which contribute to the gap in performance between schools, particularly those in prosperous and deprived areas;
- develop a definition of “good performance” which has regard to added value and overall targets for achievement under Better Wales and the Education and Training Action Plan;
- identify schools in Wales and further afield which demonstrate consistently good performance;
- identify the key factors (educational, social, and economic and in terms of resource allocation) which contribute to consistently good performance;
- make recommendations as to how these key factors might be applied in all LEAs in Wales, with specific regard to the roles and responsibilities of the National Assembly, LEAs, headteachers / senior managers in schools, teachers and governors.

I have shared the Chairing of the group with Councillor Jeff Jones of the WLGA. I am pleased Cynog Dafis AM, has been a member of the Group. Good progress is being made. The Task Group is greatly encouraged by the outcomes of the work it has set in train but is firmly of the view that the issue is of such importance that it wishes to have more time to test the statistical data and the conclusions drawn from them, to ensure there is a firm evidence base, which will withstand scrutiny, on which to develop future policy.

I therefore propose to bring the report of the Task Group to the next meeting of the Partnership Council on 15 July 2002.

3. PE AND SCHOOL SPORT.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving health and fitness levels in Wales and to giving sport a renewed emphasis in schools and local communities. In particular, it is recognised that PE and school sport makes a vital contribution to the health, physical fitness and general development of young people.

The PE and School Sport Task Force “Action Plan for Wales”, published in June 2001, established a platform for the improvement of standards in physical education and school sport for all young people in Wales. I welcomed the plan and made resources available to the Sports Council for Wales (SCW) to take forward a number of the key recommendations. In undertaking this work SCW is working closely with the New Opportunities Fund to ensure that the work proposed complements NOF funding – £48m over 4 years – for PE and sport in schools. The NOF funding targets the building of new facilities and refurbishment of existing facilities. The SCW work majors on raising standards through curriculum and staff development and the promotion of local partnerships to develop and disseminate good practice.

The work is being led by a National Development Manager appointed by SCW and working to a steering group drawing together specialists from ACCAC,

Estyn, the Youth Sports Trust, SCW and Welsh Assembly Government officials. The steering group has the power to co-opt additional specialist input as required. The Development Manager is charged, initially, with the piloting of a number of local Curriculum Development Centres (CDC) to test innovative approaches to the delivery of the curriculum. Each CDC brings together a number of primary and secondary schools to work with local partners, including colleges, higher education providers and leisure centres, to identify and make best use of innovative approaches to the sharing of facilities, expertise and best practice. The approaches used and lessons derived – over a two year period - will be shared with others to contribute to the raising of standards across Wales.

Since January 3 CDC's have been put in place - Caerphilly, Aberystwyth and Carmarthen – with plans to establish up to 16 CDCs by April 2003. To date good progress has been made and, in particular, firm linkages have been established with the network of school co-ordinators put in place as part of the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes. This is an excellent example of how initiatives can be drawn together at the local level to support schools in work with young people. Further projects will be launched during the course of 2002-03 to look at ways and means of ensuring that Initial Teacher Training provides trainees with necessary skills to teach physical education and also to enhance opportunities for continuing professional development in physical education for all teachers.

4. VOLUNTARY SECTOR PARTNERSHIP

My second meeting with the Voluntary Partnership Council took place in October and the minutes of that discussion are attached at annex B. I shall be meeting them again on 29 April when discussion is expected to cover progress so far on implementing the Voluntary Sector partnership scheme in education, Welsh for adults, the National Council Corporate Plan and developments in Extending Entitlement. I find these meetings a valuable opportunity to gain a good understanding of the concerns of the Voluntary sector and to gain their perspective on policy initiatives we are considering.

5. ICT

Following the rollout of the whiteboard grant scheme to schools across Wales in March, we are working with the ELWa Expert Group on ICT to discuss ways of extending training and technical support to schools and LEAs utilising funding available under the Assembly's broadband strategy.

Tenders for the ICT Task Force and NGfL Cymru contract were received on 18 March. We are presently following up issues, which have arisen in appraisal of the tenders and hope to announce the award of the contracts by the end of the month.

6. SCIENCE YEAR

The first phase of Wales Science Year is now complete. Action has included the development of the Wales Science Year website, grant funding for secondary school scientific projects and activities; and the distribution of science CD-roms to schools. Assembly funding has also provided Intel digital microscopes for secondary and specials schools and digital whiteboards for use in secondary school science departments (as part of the broadband / whiteboard) initiative. I announced details of future activities in February: these include a second round of project funding for schools and other organisations, with an increased focus on strengthening links between primary and secondary schools, and with further/higher education and business – supporting the long term aim of promoting careers in science.

7. ESTYN'S ANNUAL PLAN 2002-03.

I have recently agreed Estyn's Annual Plan for 2002-03. The plan was prepared in accordance with s87 of the Learning and Skills Act, 2000 and ensures that Estyn's work complements the Government's Learning Country agenda. It provides an outline of strategic priorities for 2002-05 and also sets out details of the inspection and advice to be provided in 2002-03. The plan has been published on Estyn's website (www.estyn.gov.uk).

8 . CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS TO INTRODUCE A MANDATORY REQUIREMENT FOR FIRST-TIME HEADTEACHERS TO HOLD THE NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATION FOR HEADSHIP (NPQH)

I intend to introduce a mandatory requirement for all first-time headteachers in Wales to hold the NPQH or to be accepted on the programme prior to taking up headship. A consultation on proposals as to timing, and details of the implementation of the requirement will be held in September 2002.

The revised NPQH, which I introduced in Wales in January 2002, has made the qualification a better-structured, more streamlined programme by providing greater support from tutors and a sharper focus on school based assessment. Candidates also complete in a much shorter time-scale, increasing throughput. The current position in Wales is that the number of candidates who have successfully completed the qualification has reached 198, with a further 263 candidates working towards the NPQH on the previous model. The majority of these remaining candidates are projected to qualify by December 2002. A new intake of 188 candidates enrolled for the revised model in January 2002, and these will all have completed by August 2003. These figures indicate that almost 650 senior teachers in Wales are predicted to be NPQH holders by September 2003. This figure does not include applicants from the next recruitment round in September 2002.

I am persuaded that initial data from LEA's for the annual turnover of headteachers in Wales over the last four years suggests the number of

candidates achieving the NPQH is likely to exceed by a significant margin the number of posts available, even taking into account that some have already attained headship.

However, I am conscious that the revised NPQH remains a comparatively new qualification in Wales. It still has to bed down. The previous model NPQH still has a significant number of candidates projected to complete by April 2003. There remain a number of issues, which require further investigation. For those reasons, it is likely that the earliest date that could be considered for the introduction of a mandatory requirement for first time headteachers in Wales to hold the NPQH could be September 2005. This will however be dependent on the views expressed in the consultation.

I have set 2005 as a target date to allow pre-consultation discussions to be undertaken with stakeholders to ensure that all issues of national significance are included in the consultation this autumn. A consultation document will then be prepared for issue in September 2002 on when the NPQH should be made mandatory in Wales. This will lead to further advice in January 2003 and also signal the Assembly's intentions to the profession prior to the next NPQH recruitment round in mid September 2002. Monitoring of applications during the 2002 recruitment round for the NPQH will ensure that all aspects of the process are rigorous and that numbers remain sufficiently robust to confirm the date supported through consultation. A project board will be established to involve the main stakeholders in the process of preparing for the consultation.

9. CCETs

Audit Report

The Assembly Government completed an Audit of CCET Membership, I then sent the resulting report to CCET Chairs, the National Council and ELL Members on 14 November.

The Audit identified a number of areas where membership of CCETs in general could be seen to be deficient, though it noted that difficulties with membership from under represented sectors varied between individual CCETs. Deficiencies were noted from under-represented groups (ethnic, disabled and women), the voluntary sector, Welsh medium schools, higher education and trades unions. The report also sought to share examples of CCET structure and supporting networks through which CCETs engage with the communities they serve.

The report recognised that CCETs were voluntary partnerships; that Members were not appointed by any particular body; and that a balance of membership needed to be struck while maintaining manageability of the CCET. However, the report also recommended that CCETs immediately review current representation to ensure that the under-represented groups identified were engaged in CCET business. Specifically, CCETs were asked to redress any imbalance by March 2002.

CCET Visits

I undertook to visit all the CCETs during their first year of existence and these visits are now complete. I have used the opportunity of the visits to re-iterate the importance of a balanced representation on the consortium especially from the voluntary sector and from the trade unions.

During the more recent visits, I noted that consortia are actively considering how they can better serve the needs of their area through re-structuring their CCET and assessing representation from all sectors to improve their effectiveness

2nd National CCET Conference

I addressed the second national CCET conference on Wednesday 17 April at the Royal Welsh Showground in Builth Wells. There was an impressive attendance of some 200 delegates which resulted in constructive discussion of issues effecting the consortia and the National Council's updated guidance to CCETs. Crucial to the success of CCETs will be the quality of support available to them from the National Council and I have challenged the Council to ensure it is in a position to respond appropriately to CCETs needs.

10. WELSH BACCALAUREATE

On 17 April I was delighted to attend the announcement, by the WJEC, of the schools and colleges that will participate in the first cohort of the Welsh Baccalaureate when pilots start in September 2003. I made clear from the outset that I wanted the Welsh Baccalaureate to be a qualification that would work in schools and colleges from Merthyr to Colwyn Bay and that is exactly what we get from the 19 pilot centres (see Annex C).

I am pleased that the first pilots will span all parts of Wales and include a number of different kinds of centres. Each centre will make an important contribution to the pilot. As I said at the launch, this is a piece of Welsh education history. The Welsh Baccalaureate - developed in Wales and for Wales - will be distinctive, modern and proudly Welsh.

Already other schools and colleges are coming forward and expressing an interest as pilot centres for future years. The second and third cohorts of centres will begin to deliver the Baccalaureate in September 2004 and September 2005.

11. CILT Cymru / Languages Count

On 18 May I attended the launch of Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) Cymru and was able to launch our National Modern Foreign Languages Strategy "Languages Count". The event was held

at CILT Cymru's offices at Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff Bay which will also be the base for the Consejería de Educación in Wales. CILT Cymru not only boasts eminent individuals from Wales itself, it is also a tremendous privilege to have on board José Luis Estafani from the Spanish Embassy Education Office.

The prime aim of CILT Cymru is to promote a greater national capability in languages. CILT Cymru will address the agenda and priorities set by the Welsh Assembly Government and in partnership with other agencies, including ACCAC, Estyn. It will also work closely with employers in Wales, particularly those, which need language skills for exporting or other purposes.

The Nuffield Report, published in May 2000, highlighted a need to improve the take up and standards of language learning across the UK. Inspection evidence from Estyn further underlined the need for action in Wales. The Nuffield Report called for a national strategy for languages. I am delighted that the Welsh Assembly Government has delivered on that in Wales. Our strategy also addresses a number of the key Nuffield proposals:

- The establishment of CILT Cymru will help raise the profile of languages in Wales;
- The introduction of foreign language pilots at Key Stage 2 will give young children a flying start;
- **New Estyn guidance for schools will be available to improve arrangements in secondary schools;**
- The language module in the Welsh Baccalaureate will make languages a specified component of the 16-19 curriculum;
- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales's strategic review of higher education MFL provision will examine the organisation and funding of languages in higher education.

Minister's Engagements from 20th March – 23rd April 2002

20th March

KEYNOTE ADDRESS - Welsh Vice-Chancellors and Principals on Equal Opportunities

SPCH - International Youth Programme 'Cardiff-Canberra' departure Event

21st March

SPCH - National Primary Trust Annual Congress

PRESENT PRIZES - St Teilo's Church-in-Wales High School Speech Day

22nd March

SPCH - WPSA Conference

23rd March

ATTEND - Opening of Wrexham Science Festival 'Scientrific day

25th March

MTG - ELWA

MTG - ELWA / WDA and Minister for Economic Development

MTG - RNID Cymru

MTG – Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

MTG – Secondary Heads Association (SHA)

ATTEND - Reception/Presentation Annual University of Glamorgan Report

26th March

SPEECH - ATL UK Annual Conference

OPEN - Ann Aylan Centre/Present Basic Skills Award to Fitzalan High School

OPEN - Refurbished Careers Wales Cardiff Offices/LAUNCH Workforce Development leaflets

PHONE INTERVIEW -Think Teaching Magazine

OPEN - SNAP CYMRU Offices

MTG - National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education (NATFHE)

MTG - National Union of Teachers (NUT)

MTG - Sir David Williams

27th March

PRESENT - Basic Skills Quality Mark Award to Ammanford Infant School

ATTEND/VISIT- In-Sight Project, Amman Valley Centre, Ammanford

SPCH - Launch ishine Project

PRESENT PRIZES - Prizegiving at Ysgol Gyfun Emlyn Comprehensive School

28th March

MTG - National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)

MTG - Mr Viv Thomas

SPCH - Launch DYSG
SPCH - Parc Lewis Primary School Presentation of Basic Skills Award

29th March

SPCH - NUT Cymru Dinner, Bournemouth

8th April

MTG - Autism Cymru
MTG - Caerphilly CCET

10th April

MTG - Conwy CCET
PRESENT - Certificates and open new Learner Centre ITC Steel Partnership
Training, Shotton Works, Deeside
MTG - Denbigh CCET

15th April

LAUNCH - Bilingual Dyslexia CD for Parents

16th April

MTG - Professor Robbins of Lampeter College
SPCH - Launch of Tourism Training Forum for Wales

17th April

SPCH - Community University of North Wales Lifelong Learning Conference,
NEWI, Wrexham
SPCH - Launch Welsh Baccalaureate Pilot Centres, Builth Wells
SPCH - CCET Conference, Builth Wells
SPCH - Working Links Millennium Awards & Dinner

18th April

SPCH - Joint Launch of National Language Strategy / CILT Cymru
ADDRESS - Construction Industry of Wales Training Board 'Building the
future of Wales' Conference

19th April

SPCH - NAHT Annual Conference, Aberystwyth

20th April

ADDRESS - National Association for Special Needs in Wales Conference,
Swansea

22nd April

VISIT- Denbighshire LEA
VISIT - Rhyl Community College celebrate Beacon Award

23rd April

ATTEND - BITC Cymru/Wales Business Leaders Breakfast
PHOTO CALL - Launch Apprentice of the Year Competition

MEETING BETWEEN THE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING AND REPRESENTATIVES OF VOLUNTARY SECTOR NETWORKS

DATE: 15 October 2001

VENUE: Conference Room B, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff

PRESENT

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Jane Davidson AM | Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning |
| Roger Bishop | SNAP Cymru |
| Sandra Skinner | Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Services (CWVYS) |
| Audrey Jones | Welsh Assembly of Women |
| Catriona Williams | Children in Wales |
| John Bolingbroke | U3A |
| Rhian Davies | Disability Wales |
| Ruth Hopkins | Wales Association of County Voluntary Councils |
| Jaci Taylor | CYD |
| Janet Williams | Genesis Wales |
| Alice Greenlees | Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) |
| Phil Jarrold | Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) |
| Alan Lansdown | Head of Pupil Support Division |
| Mei Lin Ng | Pupil Support Division |

APOLOGIES

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Catherine Hester | Oxfam Cymru |
| Graham Price | Workers Education Association South Wales |
| Cathryn Al Kanaan | Cyfanfyd |

PURPOSE

The National Assembly's Voluntary Sector Scheme requires that each Assembly Minister meets representatives of relevant voluntary sector networks at least twice in any one calendar year.

SYNOPSIS

Actions Arising from the Meeting

- The Minister is in dialogue with the Minister for Health and Social Services in tackling the problems facing speech and language therapy, including the need to recruit and retain speech and language therapists in Wales.

- The Minister is in dialogue with the Department for International Development in taking forward education for sustainable development.
- Voluntary sector representatives will monitor the education of looked after children, following the enactment of the Leaving Care Act and will keep the Minister informed of their concerns and any proposals.
- Individual Learning Accounts to be a main agenda item at the next meeting.
- The Minister will meet the Chief Executive and Chair of Careers Wales to discuss the type of arrangement that should be established between Careers Wales and the voluntary sector.
- Early Years provision and the research findings to be a main agenda item at the next meeting.
- The voluntary sector will write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, as Chair of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Children and Young People, about funding arrangements for voluntary sector involvement in pre-16 activity.
- A meeting between the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Health and Social Services and voluntary sector partners to be arranged when appropriate.
- Voluntary sector representatives will raise the issue of food policy with the Minister for Health and Social Services.
- Voluntary sector representatives to write to the minister to let her know if the draft directions and guidance on Extending Entitlement meet their needs.
- The Minister will feed back the concerns of voluntary sector partners to the Careers Companies at her meeting on 23 November.
- Alan Lansdown will arrange for the Assembly official involved with careers policy to contact voluntary sector partners about the establishment of the working group before the Minister's meeting on 23 November.
- The Minister will ask Elizabeth Taylor to take up the issue of ensuring that local authorities fulfil their access obligations.
- Voluntary sector representatives will monitor progress on improvements in access to schools and keep the Minister informed of any concerns.
- Consideration of whether policy development in the area of Special Educational Needs should be on the agenda of the next meeting.

- The Minister will raise with David Aherne and Chris Burdett the Home Office funding of information to parents and the reasons why Wales is not benefiting from funding for this initiative.

Issues which may inform the Assembly as a whole in developing policy

- ◆ Consider actions that could be taken to encourage people from under-represented groups, including women, people from ethnic minorities and disabled people, to apply for public appointments.

ISSUES RAISED

Welcome

The Minister welcomed voluntary sector partners and thanked them for attending.

Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting

Speech and Language Therapy

The Minister affirmed that she and the Minister for Health and Social Services were very committed to resolving the problems of provision of speech and language therapy, which had continued for many years. She said that the Therapy Working Group had held several meetings since the Spring and were in the final stages of preparing a Report to Ministers. A senior official was overseeing this process. She said that she and the Minister for Health and Social Services also worked closely with the Welsh Language Board and that the Minister for Health and Social Services was looking at pay, recruitment and retention. She acknowledged, however, that the problems would take time to resolve and required a long term approach.

Voluntary sector representatives said that they were pleased that progress was being made and that incentives to recruit and retain speech and language therapists were being considered. However, they expressed concern that speech and language therapists were leaving Wales and asked that this issue should be looked at.

The Minister agreed. She said that one of the strengths of having the National Assembly for Wales was that the Assembly was very well placed to tackle this type of issue.

Action

The Minister is in dialogue with the Minister for Health and Social Services in tackling the problems facing speech and language therapy, including the need to recruit and retain speech and language therapists in Wales.

Education for Sustainable Development

The Minister reported that the Education for Sustainable Development Advisory Panel had been established and had already met three times. The first meeting was held on 31 May. The Advisory Panel included several voluntary sector representatives. The Minister said that she was also working with the Department for International Development in taking forward education for sustainable development.

Action

The Minister is in dialogue with the Department for International Development in taking forward education for sustainable development.

Funding for Ethnic minorities

The Minister said that she regretted that nobody from the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council was present as this issue was very important for ensuring equality.

Voluntary sector representatives confirmed that funding for ethnic minorities was not on the agenda for the next partnership meeting but hoped that it would be on a future agenda.

The Minister said that this issue went beyond the education remit. She said that it was an important issue and needed to be looked at thoroughly.

Basic Skills

The Minister said that she understood that voluntary sector representatives did not wish to discuss basic skills at the meeting. She said, however, that if they wished to raise this issue at a subsequent meeting, she would be happy to discuss it with them.

Education for Looked After Children

Voluntary sector representatives explained that they had originally intended to write to the Minister about making money available to support the education of looked after children, so that they could catch up on what they had missed. They said, however, that with the Leaving Care Act coming into force, they felt that it would be better, in the short term, for them to monitor the effect of the new legislation. They said that they would then write to the Minister, highlighting their concerns and proposals.

The Minister said that she had cleared the Guidance for Looked After Children. She said that a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Children and Young

People was in operation. In addition, she and the Minister for Health and Social Services held bilateral monthly meetings to discuss issues of concern. She said that it would be helpful if voluntary sector representatives kept in touch with her on the difficulties facing looked after children.

Voluntary sector representatives agreed to do this. They said that they were pleased that funding was available for looked after children up to the age of 21 but asked for it to be extended to 26 for people who had fallen behind with their education.

Action

Voluntary sector representatives will monitor the education of looked after children, following the enactment of the Leaving Care Act and will keep the Minister informed of their concerns and any proposals.

Letter to Ms Enid Rowlands About Issues Relating to ELWa

The Minister confirmed that the concerns raised at the last meeting had been passed on to the National Council – ELWa. She said, however, that issues relating to ELWa were being raised as a main agenda item and would be discussed later.

Individual Learning Accounts

It was agreed that Individual Learning Accounts would be a substantive agenda item at the next meeting.

The Minister said that the target set for take up of Individual Learning Accounts by March 2002 had already been met.

Action

Individual Learning Accounts to be a main agenda item at the next meeting.

Meeting with Careers Wales

The Minister said that they would discuss Careers Wales later, as a main agenda item. She confirmed, however, that she would be meeting the Chairs and Chief Executives of the Careers Wales Companies and said that the meeting would take place on 23 November.

Voluntary Sector Involvement in Early Years Provision

The Minister reported that Early Years had moved on substantially since the last meeting. She said that both WPPA and MYM were very much involved in the Early Years Advisory Group. She explained that Early Years and Childcare Partnerships were required to include voluntary sector representatives and that she was not aware of any problems in this respect.

She asked the voluntary sector representatives to let her know if problems did arise.

Voluntary sector representatives said that voluntary sector involvement across Wales was variable. This was partly because, in some parts of Wales, they did not have the same capacity for involvement. They said that research into this issue was being carried out, but was currently in the early phase, so it was too early to draw conclusions from it. Nevertheless, they could report that access to funding was a concern, but that there were also many positive stories.

Voluntary sector representatives reported that, because of the loss of specialist posts focussing on children, it was more difficult to bring people together to discuss children's needs. The need for capacity building was a constant theme. They also raised the problem that, even if voluntary sector representatives were involved and did attend meetings, they were not necessarily able to influence decision making. They said, however, that the research should highlight any problems in this area. They suggested that Early Years provision should be revisited at the next meeting, after the research had been completed. They also raised the issue of training provision.

The Minister said that it was very important that good practice around Wales was identified and disseminated. She said that her primary concern was to ensure that the voluntary sector was represented, but having ensured that, she would also want to know how effective the representation was. She said that she needed to ensure that her ambition of a mixed economy for Early Years provision was being achieved. Regarding training, the Minister pointed out that the Early Years Advisory Group had a Training Sub-Group. She said that "The Learning Country" also made proposals about this. She promised that training would not be forgotten, but felt that other issues, such as pay, also had to be looked at.

Action

Early Years provision to be a main agenda item at the next meeting.

Funding Arrangements to Assist Voluntary Sector Involvement in Early Years Provision and Pre-16 Education

The Minister said that, although a Bid had been submitted, it had not been successful. She pointed out that this had been a very tight year and that they should look to the Comprehensive Spending Review of 2003-4. She explained that, at present, the Budget was only in draft, so the decision was not final. She assumed, therefore, that the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council could look at the Budget during discussions.

Voluntary sector representatives raised concerns about the absence of funding for pre-16 education. They also referred to their impression that the Budget had indicated an increase in spending on education over the previous

year. They pointed out that, in pre-16 education, there was no grant mechanism. Grant mechanisms were available in most other areas, though they were not necessarily adequate.

Voluntary sector representatives suggested that, even though funding may not be available at present, it might be possible to identify and agree a principle which would mean that funding would be forthcoming when it was available.

The Minister said that the increase in the Education Budget had more to do with major Assembly commitments such as teachers' pay and pay for staff in further and higher education. She said that funding arrangements to assist voluntary sector involvement needed to be looked at again, but she was not hopeful in the short term. She said that the next few months should be used to make a strong case. She suggested that voluntary sector representatives might wish to respond in terms of the Children and Young People's Framework and in terms of the draft budget, but said that many other interests would be responding to the Budget. She explained that the Assembly was still working with inherited patterns of funding and emphasised the importance of putting up a case that both she and Jane Hutt, as Minister for the Voluntary Sector, could agree to. She said that they would need to look at whether, through the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council, changes could be made to voluntary sector funding to reflect the needs and concerns of the voluntary sector.

The minister pointed out the difference between education and other areas. She said that her total funding mechanism was through the school mechanism and through the local authorities. She said that any alternative arrangements were made by the local authorities and that they were encouraged to engage with partners. She said that innovative partnerships already existed in the field of disaffection, but that in education, additional funding was not provided, except to the LEAs.

Voluntary sector representatives said that the money available was insufficient to cope with all the activities across the sectors. They pointed out that the only opportunity to get funding for children was the Children and Family Support Scheme.

The minister suggested that they might wish to write to the Minister for Health and Social Services as Chair of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Children. She said that the minutes of the Cabinet Sub-Committee were published and they would be able to engage in a fuller debate. She suggested, however, that their letter should not just focus on funding for education.

The minister pointed out that a Measure in the Objective One document, available for disaffected young people under the age of 16, was not being taken up sufficiently. She suggested that this could be taken up by the voluntary sector, because it was an area in which the voluntary sector made a considerable contribution.

Action

The voluntary sector will write to the Minister for Health and Social Services, as Chair of the Cabinet sub-committee on Children and Young People, about funding arrangements for voluntary sector involvement in pre-16 activity.

Joint meeting with the Minister for Health and Social Services

Voluntary sector representatives raised the possibility of holding a joint meeting with the Minister and her colleague, the Minister for Health and Social Services, to discuss both issues affecting children and young people and youth justice issues.

The Minister said that the Children and Young People's Framework was still out to consultation. She suggested, however, that when that process was completed, they could consider holding a joint meeting.

Action

A meeting between the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, the Minister for Health and Social Services and voluntary sector partners to be arranged when appropriate.

Food Policy

Voluntary sector representatives confirmed that they would raise the issue of food policy with the Minister for Health and Social Services.

The Minister said that she and the Minister for Health and Social Services were doing a lot of work on Healthy Schools.

Action

Voluntary sector representatives will raise the issue of food policy with the Minister for Health and Social Services.

MAIN AGENDA ITEMS

The Minister said that she was very pleased with the papers that voluntary sector representatives had prepared. She said that meetings with the voluntary sector were very useful because they ensured that Ministers were aware of and clear about the issues that people working in the voluntary sector had to face.

Representation on the ELWa Board, Regional Committees and CCETs

The Minister said that the purpose of the Compact between ELWa and the voluntary sector was to ensure that the voluntary sector had an effective voice and to encourage greater partnership working.

Voluntary sector representatives raised concerns about representation on the ELWa Board, Regional Committees and CCETs. They suggested setting equality targets to be achieved within a set time frame. They said that they would like to see women's perspectives more strongly represented, including minority ethnic and disabled women and asked if the National Assembly for Wales could deal with this issue.

The minister explained that ELWa was brought together from existing organisations. Nonetheless, the posts had been advertised in a wide range of newspapers. She said that the Assembly's public appointments policy operated on the Nolan principles, which sought the best people for the job. Therefore, a quota system could not be used. She acknowledged, however, that a lot of work was needed on bringing people forward from under-represented groups and encouraging them to apply. She also referred to the Assembly's intention to look at Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies to ensure that under-represented groups were better represented. She said that the National Council and the Regional Committees were appointed on the basis of their expertise and that she was encouraged by the fact that, within ELWa, some key positions were held by women.

The Minister said that she had been involved in appointing ELWa's Chairman and was delighted that an extremely competent woman was chosen. She said that the Chairman was keen to ensure that, as posts became available, new appointment arrangements would be adopted.

Turning to CCETs, the Minister explained that they were voluntary partnerships, and that the representatives who sat on them were nominated by their organisations. She said that it was important to get the right balance of expertise on the CCETs and ensure that under-represented groups were included. For that reason, she was currently carrying out an audit of membership of CCETs, but did not yet have results. In looking at CCETs, she said that it was essential to look at attendance as well as membership. She said that she also needed to ensure that the work of the voluntary sector was taken into account.

The Minister said that the paper produced by voluntary sector representatives was very useful because she could use it to encourage CCETs to be more representative.

Voluntary sector representatives raised a number of concerns about ensuring the full participation of both people from ethnic minorities and disabled people. They pointed out that Black and ethnic minority representation was very low and expressed concern that the voices of these communities were not being heard. They asked the Minister if she had any thoughts about actions to encourage members of these communities to apply for public appointments. Regarding disabled people, they pointed out that it was often difficult for them to get the relevant skills to enable them to participate because they were often unable to get work. Furthermore, although it was possible to access funds to provide services to disabled people, funds could not be accessed for activities that would build confidence in participation. They suggested that, in

assessing who was the best person for the job, it was important not to focus solely on professional experience. Other factors were relevant and should be taken into account, such as the skills that disabled people developed when finding out about and accessing their rights and entitlements.

The Minister said that it was vital to take into account equality issues when creating and developing policy and that there was a particular need to look at capacity building for Black and ethnic minority groups and disabled people. She said that there was a need for virtual communities, because many representatives could not come regularly to meetings. For that reason, money was available in the first year, so that the technology could be put in place to allow this to happen. She said that the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council was looking at capacity building, which would encourage the involvement of under-represented groups. She was delighted that, within Communities First, there were 99 geographical communities and one community of people from ethnic minorities.

The ELWa/Wales Council for Voluntary Action Conference on 6 July

The Minister asked voluntary sector representatives to report on the Conference.

Voluntary sector representatives reported that over 250 people had attended and that it had been a useful opportunity to ensure that ELWa staff were aware of voluntary sector requirements. They said that 36 people had volunteered to take forward the Compact and that they were delighted by the enthusiasm of so many people. This group had now met twice and a meeting was being arranged with ELWa to focus on what should be in the Compact.

They said that the issues that they wished the Compact to address included:

- ◆ recognition of all forms of learning, both formal and informal;
- ◆ appropriate funding methodology;
- ◆ quality issues; and,
- ◆ a compact that would be both robust enough to make things happen and able to take into account compacts at local level and the two Regional Compacts.

They hoped that the Compact would be launched in 2002.

The Minister said that she had been very pleased at the large attendance and the wide interest shown at the Conference.

Extending Entitlement

The Minister said that she needed to get the draft directions and guidance out. She was concerned to ensure that the Directions and Guidance would provide firm protection to the role of the voluntary sector on the ground. She said that a very large external reference

group had been involved and that responses to the consultation indicated a great deal of support for the direction that the Assembly was taking. Enquiries had even come from other parts of the United Kingdom about the impact of making Extending Entitlement statutory. She reported that a very solid team of Assembly officials and secondees was working in this area. She asked voluntary sector representatives if they had met Liz Williams, who would now head the team, but assured them that no hiatus had existed prior to this new appointment.

Voluntary sector representatives said that they would like to see the guidance indicating that at least a third of the places on the proposed partnerships would be allocated to the voluntary sector and were concerned about the patchiness of voluntary sector involvement at local level. The Minister was also asked whether the guidance had been proofed to ensure that it met voluntary sector needs.

The Minister said that the patchiness of voluntary sector involvement was probably due to the fact that it was early days and partnerships were in the process of being formed. She asked voluntary sector representatives to let her know whether draft directions and guidance met their needs. She said that the draft guidance had been proofed to ensure that it met voluntary sector needs, but that a consultation would be carried out. She said that £200,000 were available this year and, subject to budget decisions, the same amount would be available next year to allow organisations to improve their capacity. She said that it was a positive story and she had the money for it.

Action

Voluntary sector representatives to write to the Minister to let her know if the draft directions and guidance on Extending Entitlement meets their needs.

Arrangements to be Established Between Careers Wales and the Voluntary Sector

Voluntary sector representatives expressed their disappointment about how Careers Companies viewed working with the voluntary sector. They said that this had become clear as the result of a telephone survey that the voluntary sector had carried out.

The Minister said that there was a new remit for Careers Wales, which was established in April this year. It was therefore a very new organisation. She said that she would be happy to draw the attention of Careers Companies to the work that voluntary sector organisations had done. She also agreed that she would ask the Careers Companies about the extent to which they were involving the voluntary sector and would emphasise the importance of partnership working. She said that it was important to keep the dialogue going. She pointed out that one area with which Careers Companies were

involved, in which the voluntary sector could play a strong role, was adult guidance. However, this could only occur where resources were sufficient.

Voluntary sector representatives made the point that the first point of adult guidance was very often the first teacher or tutor that the adults trusted and who would then refer them on. They suggested that training should be provided to enable the teachers and tutors to refer people on appropriately and provide support. They suggested that the Minister should ask Careers Wales to look at the approach adopted in England, where Information, Advice and Guidance were provided and the voluntary sector was involved. They also suggested that it would be useful to set up a working group that would include representatives from the voluntary sector and from Careers Wales.

The minister agreed to feed back to the Careers Companies the concerns raised by the voluntary sector. She said, however, that she was pleased to attend a UK Wide conference of Careers Associations here in Wales and the careers associations had been complimentary about the all-age service.

Regarding the establishment of a working group, Alan Lansdown suggested that voluntary sector representatives should discuss this with the official dealing with this area and agreed to speak to the official about this.

The minister asked that this be done before her meeting on 23 November.

Action

The Minister will feed back the concerns of voluntary sector partners to the Careers Companies at her meeting on 23 November.

Alan Lansdown will arrange for the Assembly official involved with careers policy to contact voluntary sector partners about the establishment of the working group before the Minister's meeting on 23 November.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act

Voluntary sector representatives expressed disappointment that the Act placed too much emphasis on special need and that disabled children would only be allowed into mainstream schools and to participate if they did not cause too much disruption. They were concerned that funding was not ring-fenced and that this might be particularly detrimental to the most disadvantaged pupils. They asked what safeguards were in place, particularly as this might not be the most popular issue. They raised the problems of access to premises and expressed concern that no ring-fenced funding was also a problem in this area. They said that, with all the competing demands, improving physical access to disabled children would not get the priority that it deserved. They were concerned that a consequence of schools being inaccessible was that disabled children might either have to go to residential schools, with all the emotional trauma of leaving family and friends, or they would have to do a lot of travelling on a daily basis, which would result in them being very tired.

The minister said that she and her colleagues at the Assembly were very pleased with the legislation, because of the Assembly's strong commitment to equality. She said that the issue now was ensuring that it was delivered effectively. She referred to the view that, where there was hypothecated funding in England, this should also happen in Wales. However, in Wales none of the budgets were hypothecated and this was a Cabinet decision that was taken in the first year of the Assembly. She said that the Assembly were putting levers in place, including the Policy Agreement and that there would be incentive funding but this was only in the process of being put in place. The Minister said that she wanted to ensure that money was available for school buildings. She said that there was regular dialogue. However, she made the point that both the Assembly and local authorities were levels of democracy. She agreed to ask Elizabeth Taylor to take up the issue of accessible schools with the local education authorities. She said that all local authorities were asked to produce Asset Management Plans, which should be in place by 2002. She said that she wanted all schools to be fit for purpose by 2010 and that the new Act redefined what was meant by "fit for purpose".

It was agreed to keep this item on the agenda to monitor developments.

The minister also made the point that a number of parents wanted to use special education. She said that she had tried to promote the right educational setting, because the rights of young people and their parents would be enhanced by having more choice. She also emphasised the importance of ensuring the right education for every child. She said that a lot of parents wanted the extra provision available in special schools. She said that the Assembly would be more explicit about policy development as this issue should be kept on the agenda for the future. She said that she was looking to have an All-Wales Strategy for Special Education because, although disability was not devolved, the legislation required delivery at the local level.

Finally, the Minister said that she was hoping to establish an SEN Tribunal for Wales, but that legislation would be needed.

Voluntary sector representatives expressed concern that, when parents asked for their children to go to special schools, they were often very much influenced by professionals. They were not influenced by special school survivors, who tended to feel disadvantaged as a consequence of being sent away to school. They said that local authorities did not consult with those special school survivors. Although they acknowledged that there were failures when disabled children attended mainstream schools, they felt that that was usually due to a failure of resources. They also felt that there should be more scope for disabled children to express their views.

The Minister made the point that it was important not to forget the needs of children who would benefit from the extra attention given in special schools. She said that it was important that the most disadvantaged children did not lose out.

Action

The Minister will ask Elizabeth Taylor to take up the issue of ensuring that local authorities fulfil their access obligations in schools.

Voluntary sector representatives will monitor progress on improvements in access to schools and keep the Minister informed of any concerns.

Assembly policy development in the area of Special Educational Needs to be on the agenda of the next meeting.

Any Other Business

Concern was expressed that Wales was not benefiting from the Home Office spending on parenting. Voluntary sector representatives reported that the Children and Families Unit had been told that the money for parenting in England was not coming to Wales to provide information to parents. They said that the Home Office should be paying money towards this and were concerned that Wales was not getting its fair share.

The Minister expressed surprise, but said that sometimes Wales did not get project bids because those eligible to submit bids were not aware that they were eligible. She said that she would discuss this matter with David Aherne and Chris Burdett and get back to the voluntary sector representatives.

Action

The Minister will raise with David Aherne and Chris Burdett the Home Office funding of information to parents and the reasons why Wales is not benefiting from funding for this initiative.

Voluntary sector representatives welcomed the Minister's decisions about league tables. They also welcomed the Paving Document, but felt that there should be greater emphasis on education for older people, not just for the economically active.

The Minister said that she advocated learning at all stages in people's lives. She acknowledged that some courses had age limits. As a result, some people over the age of 60, who wished to go to college, were denied access. She said that, wherever possible, the Assembly was trying to get rid of these barriers.

Close

The Minister thanked everyone for their attendance and said that she felt that it had been a very useful meeting.

WELSH BACCALAUREATE QUALIFICATION, PILOT CENTRES, FIRST COHORT

Coleg Glan Hafren, Cardiff
Coleg Gwent, Pontypool
Coleg Llandrillo, Colwyn Bay
Coleg Meirion Dwyfor, Pwllheli
Coleg Powys, Newtown
Coleg Sir Gâr, Llanelli
Deeside College, Deeside
Barry Comprehensive School, Barry
Neath Port Talbot College, Neath
Pontypridd College, Pontypridd
Swansea College, Swansea
St. David's Catholic, Cardiff
Builth Wells High School, Builth Wells
Cardinal Newman Catholic School, Pontypridd
Pen-y-Dre High School, Merthyr Tydfil
St. Alban's RC High School, Pontypool
St. Cyres School, Penarth
Porth County Comprehensive, Porth
Tredegar Comprehensive School, Tredegar