

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee ELL 19-02(min)

MINUTES

Date: Thursday 19 December 2002

Time: 9.00am

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Attendance	Members	Constituency
	Gareth Jones (Chair)	Conwy
	Jane Davidson (Minister)	Pontypridd
	Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
	Mick Bates	Montgomeryshire
	Cynog Dafis	Mid and West Wales
	Helen Mary Jones	Llanelli
	Jonathan Morgan	South Wales Central
	Alun Pugh	Clwyd West
	Officials	
	Richard Davies	Director, DfTE
	Elizabeth Taylor	Head, Schools Management
	Elizabeth Williams	Head, Youth Policy Team
	Keith Davies	Head, Standards and Performance

Derek Adams

Head, Higher Education

Also in Attendance:

Estyn

Susan Lewis

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of
Training and Education for Wales

Maggie Turford

Gareth Adams

Mike Haines

Committee Secretariat

Chris Reading

Clerk

Holly Pembridge

Deputy Clerk

Item 1: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.

2. Chair noted apologies from Huw Lewis and Janice Gregory.
3. The Chair told Members that, accompanied by the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk, he had visited Ysgol-y-Wern (a Welsh-medium primary school in Cardiff) to listen to pupils give their ideas for the 'school of the future'. This event was most interesting and enjoyable and was arranged by XL Wales to assist the Committee with its policy review.
4. Chair invited Members to make any declarations of interest in accordance with standing order 4.5. There were none.

Item Two: Minister's Monthly Report

Paper: ELL 19-02(p.1)

2.1 The Minister introduced her written report, which was taken as read. The Minister referred to the following additional matters:

- The Minister had responded in writing to a query from Jonathan Morgan regarding the

- distribution of **Assembly Learning Grants** and Members would receive a copy of this letter;
- Various **education statistical bulletins** had been issued recently on participation in higher education, pupils leaving school with no qualifications and class sizes in primary schools – these were on the Assembly website;
 - **Estyn** was about to issue a report in the New Year entitled "**Aiming for excellence at Key Stage 3**" and Members would receive a copy;
 - **The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales** (HEFCW) had committed **£5.3million** for major change in the structure of higher education in Wales. The Minister distributed a copy of a recent press release on this matter.

2.2 The Chair then invited Members to question the Minister. The main issues raised were as follows:

Iaith Pawb: A National Action Plan for a Bilingual Wales

- Most Members welcomed the Action Plan but felt that it could be improved in certain areas;
- Some Members felt that more details should be included (e.g. the need to expand provision between the ages of 6 and 17) and also that specific targets and timescales should be set;
- Some Members felt that the Action Plan should include a definition of a Welsh-medium school (or various categories of school) that could be incorporated in guidance, to ensure consistency across Wales;
- Some Members felt that the section on Special Educational Needs (SEN) should be expanded;
- Some Members felt that the Action Plan should include proposals to increase Welsh medium provision in higher education from the current 3% base;
- Some Members felt that the role of the Welsh Language Board should be given greater prominence;
- The Minister stated that she would take account of Members' concerns, particularly with regard to targets, and these would be reflected in the final version of the Action Plan to be launched in the New Year.

Assembly Learning Grants (ALGs)

- Jonathan Morgan referred to the Minister's letter and expressed disappointment that the take up of ALGs had not been greater, particularly in the further education (FE) sector;
- He asked the Minister to review the criteria used in allocating ALGs;
- The Minister noted these concerns and stated that the uncertainty caused by the benefits problem had had a disproportionate effect in the FE sector but this had now been resolved;
- The Minister stated that it would not be possible to assess the effectiveness of ALGs until next Christmas;
- The Minister agreed to present a paper on ALGs to the Committee in the New Year.

Item Three: 14-19 Curriculum Pathways

3.1 Elizabeth Williams updated the Committee on progress on the current consultation exercise on proposals for a 14-19 curriculum. The main issues raised are summarised below:

Consultation

- The formal consultation would end on 7 February 2003. 'Canllaw Online' and 'Funky Dragon' would be undertaking a complementary consultation;
- An action plan would be produced once the responses had been collated and this would be debated in plenary on 2 April 2003;
- The Youth Policy Team had organised coffee mornings to facilitate the consultation: five sessions had been held to date and over 500 people had participated.

Proposals

- These were set out in the consultation document provided to Members.

Issues Arising from the Consultation

- There had been a broadly positive response;
- Parents needed to understand the wider choices available to young people and a local or national campaign to publicise this might be required;
- Learning Coaches; there was a recognition that this idea could have positive benefits for the retention of young people on study courses;
- The transition period for sixth form school funding from local authorities to ELWa-National Council had caused some concern;
- There was a capacity issue: lots of different people with different skills were required to deliver the agenda for 14-19 pathways;
- Key stage three and the School of the Future policy review were linked to considerations for the 14-19 agenda.

3.2 The Chair thanked Elizabeth Williams for her presentation and invited members to ask questions.

3.3 Members broadly welcomed the proposals and congratulated Elizabeth Williams on her work so far. The following issues were raised:

Soft Skills

There was some concern that the opportunity to acquire soft skills might be perceived as a lowering of standards. Elizabeth Williams explained that skills other than academic skills were vital; for example, team working, communication and learning to learn.

Work in the Community and Voluntary Sector

Members referred to potential for work experience opportunities in the community and voluntary sectors and asked how the value of such opportunities could be demonstrated. Elizabeth Williams referred to Annex D of the consultation document.

Higher Education

It was felt that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Wales needed to be more closely engaged with the 14-19 agenda. Elizabeth Williams felt that the Welsh Assembly Government would need to work closely with HEIs to review qualifications and point scores.

14-19 Networks

Some Members felt that it was unnecessary to establish new structures and that reinforcing the role of the Community Consortia for Education and Training (CCETs) would be sufficient. Elizabeth Williams said that quite a few networks dealing with education from 14-19 and involving CCETs were already in existence in Wales. She explained that the intention was not to be too prescriptive but to assess and utilise these existing networks, including the Young People's Partnerships (YPPs).

Funding

Some Members felt that it would be illogical for pre-16 education to be funded by local education authorities and for the post-16 aspect of education to be funded by ELWa-National Council. Some Members felt that it would be more effective to have one body responsible for funding 14-19 education. Elizabeth Williams stated that there was a need for continuity and that funding mechanisms should not be a barrier to provision.

North Wales

One member referred to Annex A of the consultation document and was concerned that there appeared to have been a lack of consultation with young people from the north. Elizabeth Williams explained that there had been logistical difficulties and that this was being re-dressed during the formal consultation period.

Flexibility

Members generally welcomed the flexibility of the proposals but were concerned that this agenda would be difficult to deliver in schools, where there were more challenges. Members were told that flexible learning programmes were already happening at least with challenging pupils and this was visible through the work of the Youth Access schemes where young people's learning would be

channelled alongside personal support.

Apprenticeship

Some Members felt that the word ‘apprenticeship’ included in the consultation document was inappropriate but could not think of a suitable alternative. Elizabeth Williams suggested that it might be appropriate for learners to acquire a ‘certificate of knowledge’, practical application of that knowledge, and development of key skills – features of an apprenticeship model.

Learning Coaches

Members felt that if learning coaches were to be effective, then there would have to be an element of choice for the learner and coaches would have to have appropriate training and support. Elizabeth Williams agreed but said that this would be a difficult process. A learning coach would have to be someone who had credibility with children.

Transition

There was some concern that the problem of young people coming out of a rigid curriculum would make a jump into a different, less rigid approach to learning and it was felt that this issue needed addressing. Elizabeth Williams assured Members that there was still ongoing discussion about transition arrangements from key stage three to key stage four and about delivery of learning at key stage three.

Target

There was some discussion concerning the proposal to increase the participation rates for 16-18 year olds in education, training or employment to 95%.

Security in Out-of-School Settings

There was some concern about 14-16 settings outside school, particularly in further education colleges running programmes to help re-integrate ex-offenders into society. Whilst acknowledging the value of such programmes, Members were concerned that there should be sufficient safeguards to protect young people. Elizabeth Williams noted Members’ concerns and pointed out that there were already several out-of-school projects in existence.

Identity

Members felt that there was a risk of labelling and accrediting everything that young people did, without allowing them sufficient time and space to find their own identity. Elizabeth Williams agreed that this was important and said that the work of the Young People’s Partnerships would ensure that young people had time and space to develop at their own pace.

3.4 The Minister concluded the discussion by saying that she had been grateful for the Committee's views. The Minister confirmed her commitment to encouraging parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications. An action plan would be produced early next term, following assessment of the consultation responses.

3.5 The Chair thanked Elizabeth Williams and suggested that if Members had any further comments they should write to the Minister.

Item Four: Policy Review: School of the Future – Presentation from Estyn

Paper: ELL 19-02(p.2)

4.1 Susan Lewis, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales spoke from the recently published Estyn report 'Excellent Schools: A Vision for Schools in Wales in the 21st Century' and highlighted some key issues within the report, including:

- **Closing the gap**; the gap in performance between schools remains wide and must be addressed;
- **School in the community**; how does it benefit from the skills within the surrounding community?
- **Structures and working patterns**; the need to reassess the school day and the school year;
- **Planning, funding and accountability**; the need for three-year budgets;
- **Leadership**; the need to develop good leadership in schools;
- **Teachers as managers**; the need for effective continuing professional development for teachers;
- **School attendance**: 95 secondary schools in Wales reported up to 10% absence; the equivalent of 17 secondary schools being empty everyday.

4.2 The Chair invited Members to ask questions and the following issues were raised:

National Curriculum

Susan Lewis was asked if she felt that the National Curriculum was unduly restrictive. In response, she stated that it had served its purpose well; to improve standards and give all children the same chance in education. It was certainly not restrictive up to the age of fourteen. Thereafter, she felt that more flexible approaches were required.

Education and Training

Some Members were concerned that training was perceived to be of a lower status than education. Susan Lewis stated that training was an essential prerequisite for certain skills. However, theory

and practice were best taught together. It was important to ensure that teaching and associated learning were as exciting as possible.

Leadership and Management

Members asked how Susan Lewis perceived the role of leadership and management in the school of the future. In response, Susan Lewis said that these two issues were vitally important to make the most effective use of staff and other resources; to improve standards and the quality of the learning experience.

Role of Governors

Susan Lewis saw the future role of governing bodies as non-executive members of a board, with increased levels of accountability. Maggie Turford added that governors' had historically been supportive. In the future, the governor's role would be that of a critical friend of the head teacher, who would monitor the quality of education and bring community experience to the school.

Community Schools

Mike Haines said that schools would come to realise that working with other agencies and groups within the community was a long-term investment. Breakfast clubs provided a calm start to the day and provided nourishment for body and mind. For those with limited space or peace at home, after-school clubs and school libraries provided a safe environment to study and complete homework. Mike Haines referred to Scotland where there were integrated teams of social workers, teachers and police in some community schools.

Funding

Susan Lewis felt that a three-year budget cycle was essential in bringing stability to planning a school's activities. Annual reviews would nevertheless have to be carried out. Gareth Adams added that bidding for funding from different streams often resulted in a lack of fairness and justice. Also, the difference in the unit of funding per pupil between LEAs and lack of transparency in allocating funds resulted in a funding system that was less effective and less respected than it might be. Susan Lewis felt that the financial year should match the academic year to facilitate financial management.

Shape of the Day

Susan Lewis felt that there was scope for more flexibility in planning the shape of the school day and school year. This need not entail teachers working longer hours, it was a case of rescheduling. For example, lesson changes were disruptive; also some subjects did not need the same amount of time allocated each week – there was scope for better time management.

Gender Gap

Some Members suggested that the method of assessment might contribute to boys' under achievement compared to girls. Susan Lewis disagreed and pointed to historical data that showed this disparity existed even when the assessment method favoured boys. Susan Lewis said that this was a complex matter and was more likely related to how young people perceived themselves.

4.3 Members welcomed the report and raised several other issues. There was insufficient time for Estyn representatives to give a full reply but Susan Lewis agreed to provide a written response to these items to the Clerk in due course.

4.4 The Chair welcomed Estyn's report and thanked Susan Lewis and her colleagues for appearing before the Committee.

Item 5: Minutes of Previous Meeting

ELL 18-02(mins)

5.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting, subject to the addition of the following paragraph:

"3.10 Some Members wished to seek further clarification from NC-ELWa on specific issues but there was insufficient time for supplementary questions. The Chair suggested that Members submit these questions in writing to the Clerk, who would seek a substantive response from Steve Martin, Chief Executive."

Papers to Note

6.1 The Committee noted the draft forward work programmes for ELL Committee and also Health and Social Services Committee.

6.2 The Chair informed Members that he intended to hold an informal meeting with the teaching unions on 13 February 2003 to listen to their views on the school of the future.