



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

CABINET WRITTEN STATEMENT

TITLE: Written Statement in response to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's policy review of Special Educational Needs "Early Identification and Intervention"

DATE: 10th January 2005

BY: Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning

Purpose: To present the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee's policy review of Special Educational Needs "Early Identification and Intervention"

Responses to the Report's recommendations are set out below. The recommendations follow the Report's headings and numbering.

Multi-Agency Working

The Committee recommends that:

4.1 The Assembly Government should issue guidance to local health boards and local education authorities encouraging use of the Health Act 1999 for joint commissioning of services and pooled budget arrangements.
[3.61]

Accept

Guidance on the Flexibilities Partnership Framework was issued in 2000 and is widely available to all statutory and other bodies – including LHB and LEAs and is published on the Assembly website:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/subisocialpolicy/content/newsite/incflexpart-e.pdf>

In addition, the Assembly hosts annual All Wales national workshops on Joint Working under the 1991 Act to promote joint commissioning, pooling of budgets and sharing of good practice. The joint working flexibilities grant will

come to an end in March 2006 and the money will be made available through the Local Government Revenue Settlement, nevertheless the Assembly will continue to promote joint working and intends to issue revised guidance in 2007 in line with the grant exit criteria and to include broader developments in the area of joint commissioning. There are already some good examples of collaborative projects under the Joint working arrangements.

In the Spring the Assembly will consult on guidance under the Children Act 2004 on new arrangements to strengthen partnerships, pooling of budgets, and planning and commissioning of children services. The Assembly's Social Service Inspectorate with the Institute of Public Care is working with local authorities and their partners in training workshops on a Commissioning Development Programme for Wales, focussed on an integrated commissioning model. These measures should provide further opportunities to unlock barriers to joint working and provide a clear responsibilities on agencies to work collaboratively and effective joint commissioning.

In addition, the speech and language services pilot projects which are being established from April 2005 under the auspices of the Health Act 1999 (Partnership Arrangements) will provide further opportunities for joint commissioning and pooled budget arrangements. A joint co-ordinator, to work across health and education, is to be appointed from February 2005 to establish joint commissioning arrangements of speech and language services at a local level. LEAs, LHBs and NHS Trusts will be required to work together under a strategic partnership arrangement, to assess local needs and determine the most effective way in which identified needs can be met. The strategic partnership will consist of representatives of all interested parties at a local level, including providers of services and parents and carers.

Financial Implications

The cost of the consultation exercise on the Children Act 2004 will be met from within existing budgets

The post of co-ordinator to establish pilot projects and draft national guidance on future service delivery will be accommodated jointly within existing budgets across health and education. Additional funding to LEAs to support the establishment of integrated provision, the pilot projects, and their evaluation has been identified from within the Early Years and SEN BEL. Following the success of the last BPR, in 2005/2006 an allocation of £500,000 will be made available to LEAs as a contribution towards the pooled budget. Following the external evaluation of the pilot projects a further £1million for 2006/2007 and £1.6m for 2007/2008 will also be made available to ensure coverage across Wales.

The Committee recommends that:

4.2 If such changes towards joint commissioning are not made as a matter of some urgency, the Assembly Government should give further

consideration to amending primary legislation to resolve the anomalies of prime and ultimate responsibility. [3.62]

Accept

Consideration of changes to primary legislation will be made following an evaluation of the success of pilot projects. The Welsh Assembly Government would consider the option of statutory agencies working together and jointly commissioning services in preference to changes in primary legislation at this stage. Changes to primary legislation are likely to affect the entire statutory framework for SEN, which is to be considered by the committee as part of phase two of the review.

Financial Implications

None at present – pending the evaluation of the speech and language services pilot project and the review of the statutory framework for SEN.

The Committee recommends that:

4.3 The Assembly Government should issue guidance to local health boards and local education authorities, encouraging them to make more use of the Health Act 1999 and the Flexibilities Special Grant, to fund collaborative SEN projects (3.63).

Accept

See 4.1

Teacher training and continuing professional development

The Committee recommends that:

4.4 The Assembly Government, in its forthcoming review of initial teacher training, should give particular attention to the need for all newly qualified teachers to have a better understanding of SEN; particularly in techniques for early identification. [3.31]

Reject, but take forward issue in review of ITT course requirements

The Assembly Government's review of initial teacher training (ITT) provision will not cover the content of ITT (i.e. the requirements for ITT courses). The review will consider the way we estimate the future demand for teachers, and the routes by which qualified teacher status is obtained, so that we can produce a supply of high quality, newly qualified teachers that matches the needs of schools in Wales. Specific aspects of ITT such as the course requirements are outside the review's terms of reference.

The recommendation as worded is not, therefore, capable of implementation. However, the Welsh Assembly Government is separately in the process of

reviewing the Qualified Teacher Status standards and the statutory requirements for ITT courses, and the views expressed in this recommendation will be considered in the context of that review.

Financial Implications.

None at present

Multi-Agency Working

The Committee recommends that:

4.5 The Assembly Government should issue guidance to local education authorities to encourage provision of SEN services in accordance with the SEN Code of Practice on a regional basis, using powers in the Education Act 2002. [3.65]

Accept

We are aware that maintaining a range of services for low incidence SEN can be difficult for some LEAs. That is why the National Steering Group for SEN in Wales was established with an all Wales remit. The Education Act 2002 contains a number of Wales only clauses which allow for regional collaboration not only for goods but also for services including peripatetic teachers. Now that the provisions have been enacted we can take a lead in developing those proposals. We have already established the following provision:

- Up to £2 million was allocated for the redevelopment of Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn to become part of a regional centre for excellence in Autism for the North Wales region.
- The Assembly has also approved the release of funding for the creation of a regional facility at Fairwater High School to serve the counties of Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen and Newport. The facility will provide a 12 place resource provision for children with high functioning aspergers syndrome.

Draft guidance will be sent for consultation to all LEAs during the Summer Term 2005 following an audit of provision across Wales. Draft regulations will follow by the end of the year.

Financial Implications

£12m is currently available for the development of regional provision.

Teacher training and continuing professional development

The Committee recommends that:

4.6 The Assembly Government should issue guidance to teacher training colleges to improve initial teacher training in the identification of children and young people with special educational needs. Colleges should aim to provide general SEN training for all student teachers, and also more advanced courses for those wishing to specialise in specific branches of SEN. [3.32]

4.6 Accept in part

The Assembly Government is currently reviewing Circular 13/98 (Requirements for Courses of ITT). The proposed replacements are two pieces of subordinate legislation to be made under Standing Order 29, one covering the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) Standards and the other to include ITT Course Requirements. The Assembly does not specify the content of ITT courses and therefore cannot offer guidance on that content as part of the general ITT requirements.

The QTS Standards will require students (and therefore require ITT providers to cover this in courses) to demonstrate that they understand their responsibilities under the SEN Code of Practice, and know how to seek advice from specialists on less common types of special educational needs. The Standards will apply not only to those trained in ITT institutions (HEIs) but to those qualifying through employment based routes. ITT is designed to equip students with the necessary requirements to enable them to teach and, particularly on postgraduate and employment based routes into teaching, the time available for specialisation is very limited.

We take the view that specialising in SEN is better done once a teacher has completed their initial training and their induction year. A number of opportunities are available to teachers at a postgraduate level within the institutions e.g. M.A., M.Ed, Diploma and postgraduate certificate. Specialist courses for the mandatory qualifications in Hearing Impairment and Visual Impairment are available at University of Wales College, Newport. Many of the LEAs in Wales work in partnership with HEIs offering a range of courses to teachers wishing to increase their expertise in SEN. To this end we would be prepared to engage with HEIs to see what their reaction would be to a more co-ordinated approach to them making such provision.

We have established a task group of all Higher Education Institutions in Wales to consider the issues of CPD in special educational needs. The HEI group has worked with the Assembly in the development of an e-learning course that will give equality of opportunity in training to all teachers and Learning Support Assistants in Wales. Such a course will provide a foundation for future training in SEN and be used as a model for other courses relating to low incidence SEN groups. The course might also be of value to teachers working in England who wish to return to Wales to live and work.

This course will help teachers and learning support assistants to work more effectively with pupils with SEN and raise awareness of the factors involved in developing an inclusive school. It will be bi-lingual.

The Aims of the Course are:

To develop in participants an understanding of changing perceptions of SEN and of related terms e.g. whole school approach, 'inclusion', collaboration, disability rights.

To develop participants understanding of the four categories of SEN described in the Code of Practice for Wales (2001) and the implications of these on their classroom practice.

To assist participants to develop a professional response to a range of SEN pupils in the context of:

- (i) Identification, assessment and planning.
- (ii) Maximising curriculum access
- (iii) Differentiated teaching and learning.
- (iv) Enlisting collaborative working practices.
- (v) Promoting positive social and emotional development and behaviour.

Financial implications.

The requirement that ITT providers ensure that trainee teachers are aware of their responsibilities in respect of SEN can be accommodated without additional resources.

The initial start up costs for the E-learning course is estimated at £100k and can be met from within existing budgets.

Human Resources

The Committee recommends that:

4.7 The Assembly Government should publish the results of the recent consultation and prepare a timetable for implementing the recommendations of the SALTAG report, 'Working Together', on speech and language services for children and young people with special educational needs. [3.39]

Accept

This is to be published on the Learning Wales website by the end of February 2005. Following the publication of this report an Action Plan will be developed to take forward the agreed recommendations. We are delighted with the response to the joint consultation document "Working Together" issued in July 2003. Responses to the consultation are under consideration and will inform

guidance on the future delivery of speech and language services to children and young people aged 0 – 19 years across Wales.

We have already started to advance some of the recommendations contained within the report, such as;

- the establishment of pilot projects for joint commissioning of services using a pooled budget approach which are due to begin in April 2005 (see 4.1);
- a review of workforce planning and the recruitment, training and retention of SLTs;
- undertaken to appoint a joint co-ordinator across health and education to develop and monitor the work of the projects and bring together any final guidance;
- agreed to establish a National External Reference Group, which will have its inaugural meeting in March 2005, to monitor progress on the delivery of the recommendations and advise the Assembly on matters relating to speech, language and communication difficulties;
- advertised the post of National Liaison Officer for Welsh Medium speech and language services.

Financial Implications

See 4.1. Future financial implications of implementing recommendations will be considered as part of the development of the Action Plan which will be considered by the External Reference Group.

Welsh Medium and Bi-lingual Provision

The Committee recommends that:

4.8 The Assembly Government should publish a timetable for implementing the recommendations of the report by the Welsh Language Board, entitled 'Acknowledging Need', to improve Welsh-medium and bilingual services for children and young people with special educational needs. [3.69]

Accept

The Welsh Language Act 1993 has the fundamental principle that the Welsh and English languages should be treated on the basis of equality in the provision of services to the public in Wales. In their dealings with children and their parents all bodies should fulfil any requirements imposed on them by the Act, and adhere to the policies contained in their Welsh Language Schemes and Welsh Education Schemes.

LEAs must have regard to meeting the needs of SEN pupils in accordance with parental preference for Welsh medium or English medium educational and educational support provision. Parents who wish their children to receive their education through the medium of Welsh have the right to express that preference under the Education Act 1996. LEA's and Governing Bodies are

under a duty to have regard to that preference. When assessing a child's SEN it would not be appropriate to assess the child in a language other than the preferred language of either English or Welsh, and steps should be taken to ensure that all those involved in this process are made aware of the child's language needs.

The National Steering Group for Wales is working closely with Bangor University and the Welsh Language Board in order to take forward the recommendations of this report. A task and finish group is to meet shortly to develop an Action Plan for implementing the recommendations

Some of the recommendations e.g. establishing an SEN Tribunal for Wales and a bilingual SEN Resources website, have already been addressed and much work is under way on accessing SEN training in Welsh through the development of the bilingual e-learning course.

We are already working with colleagues across Wales on meeting the recommendations and have developed assessment materials through the medium of Welsh as suggested within the report. Further work is ongoing on piloting Welsh medium reading tests and producing a Welsh medium corpus of reading texts during Spring 2005.

A specific recommendation of the "Working Together" report was to undertake a systematic review into Welsh medium provision and staffing. It was suggested that a national liaison officer should be appointed to undertake research and provide support to the Welsh Language Speech Therapy Committee (WLSTC), with a brief to facilitate the development and sharing of resources and good practices across Wales among all SLTs. This post is currently being advertised.

Financial Implications

To be considered by the task and finish group. Funding of the post of the National Liaison Officer can be met from within existing budgets in NHS Welsh Language Unit.

Support for parents

The Committee recommends that:

4.9 The Assembly Government, in consultation with local education authorities and the voluntary sector, should update its information document for parents and carers of children and young people who may have special educational needs, to include relevant websites and LEA contacts. This document should also provide contact information for the LEA 'one-stop-shops' referred to in paragraph 4.20. [3.24]

Accept in principle

The Assembly Government updated its guidance for parents and carers in 2002 - "Special Education Needs: information for parents and carers of children and young people who may have special educational needs" This booklet was developed in collaboration with LEAs and the Voluntary sector and remains relevant to the current SEN Code of Practice for Wales. It provides advice and guidance to parents and carers on all matters related to SEN and the statutory assessment framework. It aims to help parents understand;

- what special educational needs are;
- what to do if they are worried that their child may be having difficulties at, or before they go to school;
- how they can help their child;
- what early education settings and schools can do to help their child;
- what local education authorities (LEAs) and other services can do to help their child;
- parents and children 's rights;
- the main principles of the Education Act of 1996 and the SEN and Disability Act 2001;
- the main principles of the SEN Code of Practice for Wales; and
- who to contact for advice.

It is planned to review this guidance in 2006/2007.

In addition in 2003 the Welsh assembly Government launched an information web site specifically for parents, "Parentsnet," which can be found at www.learning.wales.gov.uk/parents. The site provides information for parents on all aspects of education and training in Wales, including the curriculum, assessment, choosing schools, access to information and details of Special Educational Needs provision. It also acts as a gateway for further information, containing extensive links to documents both on Learning Wales and on the websites of ACCAC, ELWa and others.

Financial Implications

None

Support for those whose first language is neither English nor Welsh

The Committee recommends that:

4.10 The Assembly Government should commission an audit of provision of SEN services for children and young people with special educational needs, whose first language is neither English nor Welsh. [3.72]

Accept

Children with a learning difficulty or developmental delay, and whose parents do not have English or Welsh as a first language, do not have fluent English or Welsh, or are disabled, are likely to be particularly disadvantaged if any special educational needs are not identified at the earliest possible stage. Parents may be unable to voice their own concerns because of a lack of a means of communication with the provider. Where such difficulties occur, LEAs should ensure that parents and relevant professionals are provided with access to signers or interpreters and translated information material, so that early concerns may be shared about the child's behaviour, health and development. Bilingual support staff, teachers of English or Welsh as an additional language may be able to help and their support should be enlisted from the outset. Parent Partnership Services will also be a source of advice and support. Without such support early identification and intervention may be delayed or ineffective.

New data from PLASC will enable us for the first time to assess the *numbers* of children with SEN whose first language is neither English nor Welsh. The PLASC data will also enable us to assess the type of special educational need and its severity. Following this assessment and analysis we will consider the need for an audit of provision of SEN services for this group. This information should be available early in 2005.

Financial Implications

None

Health and Social Services (HSS) Committee Report on Children with Special Health Needs

The Committee recommends that:

- 4.11 The Assembly Government publish a progress report on implementing relevant recommendations from the Health and Social Services Committee's report on children with special health needs; in particular:
- Good practice in special needs education around Wales should be validated and disseminated;
 - The move to special needs provision within a mainstream setting should be welcomed, but greater emphasis should be placed on the monitoring of special needs services so that they do not become diluted;
 - The National Services Framework for Children should contain a detailed sub-section on special education and health needs;
 - A member of each local health board in Wales should be designated as responsible for children's services and children's rights; and
 - The situation of children aged less than five years with severe health needs requires urgent attention, so that they receive appropriate pre-school education. [3.75]

Accept

In December, the Minister of Health and Social Services provided a progress report on recommendations made by Health and Social Services Committee in respect of children with special health needs. This showed the positive progress made under the proposals of the National Services Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services. Consultation on the NSF concludes at the end of January. The aim is to commence implementation in 2006, but agencies are being encouraged to start work now to meet key actions.

The move to special needs provision within a mainstream setting is welcomed. The issue of quality is being addressed within the specific reviews of SEN and guidance on minimum standards has been consulted on. The Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning has issued draft guidance on Inclusive Education and distributed a copy of the Index for Inclusion to all schools in Wales. In addition Estyn are undertaking "Best Value" reviews at LEA level which specifically relate to SEN and inclusion services. This is in addition to routine inspections of schools.

The draft Children's NSF sets out standards for service delivery to all children, including those with special education and health needs. Standards have been set not just in relation to health and social care delivery but in relation to all services which have an impact on the health and well-being of children, including education, housing, leisure and transport

The recommendation that a member of each LHB should be designated as responsible for children's services and children's rights is accepted and is consistent with the Kennedy Report. Guidance will be issued to LHB's later in the year. Consultation on the detailed arrangements for lead officers and members will be undertaken in the preparation of the guidance.

With regard to children aged less than five years with severe and complex needs the LEA has a duty to undertake a statutory assessment and make available suitable provision as set out in the SEN Code of Practice for Wales. Children are eligible for assessment from their second birthday. The Assembly Government has embarked on a major expansion programme to ensure that all children have an early education place available from the term following third birthday if they so wish. This includes children with special needs.

The new Foundation Phase curriculum in Wales is based on the principle of equal access to quality provision for all children according to their needs, including those with specific difficulties. The curriculum should be flexible to allow staff working with the children opportunities to plan and provide an appropriate curriculum for children who are at an early stage of their development and for those who are more able.

Compliance with the statutory requirements of SEN and Disability Act 2001 and the Code of Practice are central to delivering standards for disabled

children and young people, this includes specific actions on special education and health needs.

The Committee recommends that:

4.12 The Assembly Ministers for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Health and Social Services, should report twice a year to their respective committees, monitoring the quality of services for children and young people with special educational needs. [3.76]

Accept

Responding to respective Education and Lifelong Learning, Health and Social Services and also the Equal Opportunities Committee's on services to children with SEN will be undertaken in the context of the Assembly's wider agenda for disabled children and young people, as well as the areas specific to SEN.

Financial Implications

None

Support for parents

The Committee recommends that:

4.13 The Assembly Government should provide funding for an advocacy service, independent of local education authorities, to reinforce its independent nature and ability to offer totally impartial advice. [3.27]

Accept in principle

All LEAs must make arrangements for parent partnership services. It is essential that parents are aware of the parent partnership service so that they know where they can obtain the information and advice they need. LEAs must therefore inform parents, schools and others about the arrangements for the service and how they can access it. LEAs must also remind parents about the parent partnership service and the availability of disagreement resolution services at the time a proposed statement or amendment notice is issued. This is a requirement placed on LEAs as part of the Education Act 1996. We have provided additional support for LEAs to enable them to fulfil this duty through Better Schools Fund.

The Welsh Assembly Government has also made a commitment to make advocacy services available to all children and young people in Wales in health, social care and education settings. Priority will be given to children in need, including those looked after by local authorities and those in the health service or away from home in other settings. In July 2003 the Assembly

Government agreed to all five recommendations in the Children's Commissioner's report *Telling Concerns*. This paper deals with a key recommendation (5.7) – the setting up of an 'Advocacy Unit in 2004, to work with Assembly policy divisions, the Task Group, service providers and commissioner's, and the in the review and development of future provision of advocacy services for children and young people in Wales.

It aims to provide a strategic direction for the independent provision of advocacy services to children and young people in Wales so that all children have equity of access to quality advocacy services in health social care and education, and to promote the development of excellence in the field.

The '*National Standards for Children's Advocacy Services*' (2003), set out Welsh Assembly Government policy for the commissioning of advocacy services. The standards set out policy for how all advocacy services should be commissioned and delivered, plus a framework for the planning, development and review of advocacy practice at all levels. In implementing this guidance, local authorities should ensure the standards are fully followed.

Following the publication of "*Telling Concerns*", the Assembly Government pledged to ensure children and young people have access to advocacy services in health, social care and education settings and has set up an Advocacy Unit in November 2004 to work with the Task group to provide a strategic direction on the future of advocacy services for children and young people.

To inform this work Cardiff University was commissioned to undertake a major study on arrangements for advocacy and complaints across health, social care and education. The study, which was completed in December 2004, and considered several aspects including different models of advocacy and the independence of service provision. The report will be invaluable in informing the review and development of advocacy for children and young people in Wales. Later this year the Assembly will consult on proposals for future advocacy services for children and young people. Presently local authorities contract the voluntary sector to provide advocacy services for vulnerable children, those in need and looked after by the local authority – and may include children with SEN.

Financial Implications

This will be considered following the outcome of the review of advocacy services as outlined above

Funding

The Committee recommends that:

4.14 The Assembly Government should create a specific budget for the funding of an independent advocacy service. [3.84]

Accept in principle

See 4.13

The Committee recommends that:

4.15 The Assembly Government should commission a review of the formula used to allocate SEN funding to local education authorities, based on an audit of need. [3.79]

Accept

A review of the formula used to allocate SEN funding to local education authorities will be undertaken during 2005. The Consultative Forum on Finance has already agreed to take forward this work through the Distribution Steering Group (DSG).

In addition to considering the incorporation of the 2001 Census variables in the special education service, DSG members are also considering extending the population indicator used from ages 5-16 to ages 0-19 and using low birth weight.

A full review of this service is required and will be on the work programme for next year. Estyn are currently looking at special education in local authorities and DSG intends to tap into this work. Service specialists would be involved in any review of this service. The review would also look at other indicators, pupil numbers etc, and to examine a link between children looked after and special needs.

Financial Implications

The review will be undertaken and financed through existing budgets. The financial implications of the review are as yet unknown.

The Committee recommends that:

4.16 The Assembly Government should increase funding for the training and recruitment of specialist staff [3.80]

Accept in principle

An audit of needs and gaps in provision will be required before any funding allocations can be agreed. Much work has already started in this area and we are aware that there are shortages of specialist staff with mandatory qualifications working across local authorities as a result of work already undertaken on sensory impairment. We are working with higher education institutions in relation to continuous professional development (CPD) to ensure a highly skilled workforce is readily available across Wales to meet children's needs. It is envisaged that the e-learning course (4.6), as an accredited course, will go some way to resolving this issue. We hope to publish proposals for CPD later this year.

Allied health professionals, such as speech and language therapists, are planned for as part of NHS Wales workforce planning. The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that many of the therapy professions are shortage professions and these issues are being addressed through workforce planning and the commissioning of undergraduate training. The therapy strategy currently being developed will refer to the provision and equity of therapy services provision across Wales. The responsibility of commissioning therapy services lies with local LHBs who have a responsibility, in partnership with other local organisations including local authorities, to identify the health needs and health priorities of their populations. These should be reflected in their local health and well being strategies, their Wanless local action plans and their commissioning arrangements. The local trusts are responsible for the provision of the therapy services that are commissioned for their population, though many do experience recruitment difficulties and retention problems and it is the responsibility of the Trust and LHB to develop strategies that meet local needs. These strategies should address local issues and issues for the professions where there are particular recruitment difficulties.

Financial Implications

Will need to be considered as part of any review of CPD requirements. Additional training for therapists is part of the wider strategy on workforce planning and has been accounted for within existing budgets for NHS Wales. See also 4.6

The Committee recommends that:

4.17 The Flexibilities Special Grant, introduced by the Assembly Government, has facilitated a number of collaborative initiatives between local health boards and local authorities. The Committee recommends that the Assembly Government should encourage further joint projects by reviewing guidance and helping to disseminate best practice. [3.83]

Accept

See response to 4.3

The Committee recommends that:

4.18 The Assembly Government should make extra resources available to the General Teaching Council for Wales, to develop bursaries for continuing professional development in the identification of SEN. [3.85]

Reject in relation to role of GTCW and purpose of bursaries

From April 2004 the Council has administered a CPD Funding Programme that seeks to provide teachers in Wales with an opportunity to receive funding to meet their individual professional development needs. The programme is not intended to fund specific policy initiatives, but to meet individual teachers' development needs (e.g. as identified through the performance management process). The funding programme gives teachers the opportunity to identify their own professional development needs and to control the funding of these activities. The Welsh Assembly Government has made £1.35 million available to support this programme. Bursaries are available to all teachers in Wales should they wish to take up this offer.

A Professional Development Bursary offers financial support up to £500 to help registered teachers with their own professional development. The bursaries will provide opportunities for teachers to receive funding for their own professional development needs, of lessons / modules/ curriculum / syllabus development within a subject / phase (but not updating a Scheme of Work).

The most appropriate mechanism to direct resources for CPD would currently be the Better Schools Fund, which is currently under review. This issue will be considered as part of that review.

Financial implications.

None [although if this were accepted and funded through some other means there would be significant costs - one teacher per school for one days training could cost in excess of £0.5m (allowing for the costs of training, supply cover and travel and expenses). This could be reduced by training clusters of schools, but is unlikely to go much below £0.4m.

The Committee recommends that:

4.19 The Assembly Government should make provision in the budget over the next three years to fund the recommendations in this report. [3.87]

Accept in part

Having recently undertaken the three year budget planning round, budgets are now set for 2005-2008. Many of the recommendations within the report have already been taken into consideration and there is a degree of flexibility within existing BELs. Recommendations that require further consideration will need to be set against other priorities before a full commitment can be made to accept additional funding requirements.

Financial Implications

- As set out in the report.

Recommendations for Other bodies

As the following recommendations relate to other bodies, outside the Welsh Assembly Government, it is not possible to commit these bodies to accepting the recommendations. The Welsh Assembly Government will draw these recommendations to their attention and officials will be asked to consult with them on their merits and feasibility of implementation. The following are the Assembly's initial comments in this regard, prior to those discussions having taken place:

Local Education Authorities

The Committee recommends that:

4.20 Local education authorities should establish a 'one-stop-shop' for parents of children and young people with SEN, to obtain relevant information. The information should be current, easy to understand and available bilingually; and in minority languages appropriate to the locality. [3.25]

The Education Act 1996 place a statutory duty on LEAs to ensure that the parent of any child in their area with special educational needs is provided with advice and information about matters relating to those needs. They must also take whatever steps they consider appropriate to make parent partnership services known to parents, head teachers, schools and others they consider appropriate on LEAs to provide information to parents.

There is currently a range of information provided to parents at both a National and local level. Voluntary organisations also play an important role in producing relevant and guidance materials for parents.

It is not envisaged that a 'one stop shop' should be in addition to what is currently provided across LEAs but seen as complimentary to enhance current provision of information for parents/carers, children and young people.

The Committee recommends that:

4.21 Local education authorities should provide funding to allow schools to recruit and train more support staff, to facilitate more effective use of therapists and specialist SEN teachers. [3.81]

Total expenditure on SEN provision in 2003-04 is budgeted to be £224 million. This represents an increase of 11% on the previous year's budget.

Delegated expenditure to special schools accounts for 21% of the total budgeted SEN expenditure in 2003-04. Notional expenditure within primary and secondary schools accounts for a further 38% of the total. The remaining 41% is made up of money held centrally by LEAs and inter-authority charges (non-delegated). This compares with 39% for non-delegated expenditure in 2002-03.

Expenditure on pupils with SEN accounts for a very significant proportion of LEAs' centrally retained budgets and also of the funding for individual schools. All LEAs experience considerable pressure on this budget element.

Currently, at least 75 per cent of the budget share for each school must be awarded on the basis of pupil numbers. However, in order to provide funding which more accurately meets the needs of schools and pupils, LEAs' funding schemes may weight pupil numbers according to, for example, the age of pupils or the special educational needs of pupils. Additional criteria, such as the number of pupils for whom English is not their first language or the size and condition of a school's buildings and grounds, may also be taken into account.

The Better Schools Fund (BSF) is paid by the NafW to LEAs which, in turn, are required to distribute the majority of these funds to schools. The grant covers, for example, raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils, improving the use of information and communications technology, and the professional development of teachers and headteachers. Some funds are spent centrally so that LEAs can discharge their own duties with respect to the programme.

The Committee recommends that:

4.22 Local education authorities should take every opportunity to make parents aware of the support that is available, including any subsequent 'one-stop-shops' that are developed. In addition, LEAs should notify parents of any changes affecting the support available to their children. [3.26]

See 4.20

If a child or young person is deemed to have special educational needs the strategies employed to enable the child to make progress should be recorded within an individual education plan (SEN Code of Practice for Wales 2002). Parents should be consulted on the contents of the IEP and involved in any review.

If a child has a statement of SEN the parents must be invited to attend any review of the statement and any proposed amendments must be formally set out and sent to them in writing. At this stage parents are given a further right to appeal, to the SEN Tribunal for Wales, against any proposed amendments.

Local Health Boards

The Committee recommends that:

4.23 Local health boards, through NHS Trusts, should consult therapists on any proposed changes. The Committee considers that, in the short term, it should be possible to synchronise the working days and holidays of teachers and therapists to provide a more effective service for children and young people. [3.59]

The working days and holidays of speech and Language therapists who are employed by the NHS are laid down under current Whitley council regulations, soon to be Agenda for Change. Changes in relation to SLTs terms and conditions would have to be within these regulations and discussions would need to be undertaken with the relevant professional bodies and unions. There are likely to be financial implications in this area and it may further exacerbate issues in attracting SLTs into the profession thus compounding current difficulties in recruitment and retention.

Teacher Training Colleges

The Committee recommends that:

4.24 Teacher training colleges should incorporate teaching techniques for the early recognition of special educational needs, and provision of appropriate support, as a standard part of their course curriculum. [3.33]

See the comment on recommendation 4.6.

The General Teaching Council for Wales

The Committee recommends that:

4.25 The General Teaching Council for Wales, in developing guidance on continuing professional development for teachers, should include a requirement to keep abreast of developments and techniques in the early identification of special educational needs, and provision of appropriate support. [3.34]

This is a matter for the GTCW. However, the Assembly Government has asked the Council to develop a professional development framework and we are currently working with the Council on this. The framework is intended to provide guidance for teachers on their professional development and assist them in identifying their development needs. This recommendation can therefore be considered in the context of this work.

The Committee recommends that:

4.26 The General Teaching Council for Wales should provide bursaries to ensure that one teacher per school, or school cluster, is trained in the identification of special educational needs; and that the training is subsequently cascaded to all members of the teaching staff. [3.20]

See comment on recommendation 4.18

Estyn

The Committee recommends that:

4.27 Estyn should further develop and disseminate advice on best practice in the early identification of SEN by publishing reports of inspections and surveys on its website www.estyn.gov.uk. [3.28]

Estyn already publish all reports on their website. In addition, the New Common Inspection Framework requires that all inspection reports make

reference to the "quality of provision for additional learning needs". This includes judgements about the extent to which providers -

- effectively diagnose individual learning needs;
- provide additional support to meet individual needs including those for learners with learning and/or physical disabilities, sensory impairments and other special needs; and
- provide appropriate support for learners whose behaviour impedes their progress and that of others.

ACCAC

The Committee recommends that:

4.28 ACCAC should further develop means of assessing and monitoring the attainment of children and young people with differing complexity of special educational needs. [3.15]

Following on from ACCAC's work on the assessment of children and young people with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), ACCAC have already been asked to look at developing further advice to schools and LEAs relating to methods of measuring the performance of all children and young people with additional educational needs as part of their remit for 2005/2006.