

POST-16 EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

REPORT TO THE ASSEMBLY

Introduction

This report is made under Standing Order 9.9 which requires each subject committee to report to the Assembly from time to time on progress in fulfilling its work programme.

The Post-16 Education and Training Committee is one of the Assembly's seven subject committees. It is chaired by Cynog Dafis. The other members are Tom Middlehurst, Christine Chapman, Alun Pugh, Elin Jones, Jonathan Morgan, Jocelyn Davies, Christine Humphreys and John Griffiths. From June 1999 to June 2000, the Committee met 22 times in Cardiff, visited the National Library of Wales and held four arts and culture meetings at venues around Wales.

Method of working

The Committee has developed an open and participative style of working. All of its meetings have been held in public and a large number of organisations have appeared before the Committee to input into policy reviews.

The Committee's remit

The Committee's remit mirrors that of the Assembly Secretary for post-16 education and training, Tom Middlehurst. The Committee's interests cover education and training beyond the compulsory school leaving age at 16, including higher education and workplace training, employment policy including oversight of the New Deal, arts and culture, sport and recreation, the Welsh language and the youth service. The Committee also has oversight of nine Assembly sponsored public bodies.

Priorities

Within its wide-ranging responsibilities, the Committee established a firm set of priorities which are stated in its strategic forward work programme. The work programme draws out the links between the committee's priorities and the targets set in the Assembly's "Better Wales" strategy, in particular, the three major themes of sustainable development, social inclusion and equal opportunities.

As agreed in March of this year, the Committee will play a major role in progressing a number of issues identified by "Better Wales" as requiring early action by the Assembly (NB: "Better

Wales" has since been revised and the next version of the work programme due in September, will link to new "Better Wales" targets). These are:

- Extending access to and awareness of the Welsh language, our culture and heritage
- Ensuring that cultural bodies take active steps to involve those who are currently socially excluded
- Ensuring that our public cultural facilities, services and information are fully accessible
- An additional 36,000 students to have been attracted into higher and further education helped by the introduction of loans for part time study and substantial new provision for Access funds
- Careers Wales to be established as an all age service with a capacity for 80,000 people a year to use its telephone help line
- Further education and training to be driven by a new National Council for Education and Training
- All major sponsored bodies to have been reviewed by 2005
- To increase the number of visitors to museums, art galleries, the National Library, theatres and heritage sites by 3% by supporting the work of the Arts Council and the National Museums, Libraries and Galleries of Wales
- To increase the number of adults taking part in sporting activities by 4% by supporting the work of the Sports Council

Policy development

At an early stage in its existence, the Committee decided to spend a large proportion of its time developing policy on specific identifiable issues. It has to date undertaken and completed a review of the recommendations in the Education and Training Action Plan and a mini-review of the activities of the National Library of Wales. It is currently conducting a review of arts and culture policy in Wales and in the autumn will begin a wide-ranging review of Higher Education in Wales.

Education and Training Action Group (ETAG)

The remit for this review was "to make recommendations on the implementation of the proposals for the provision and administration of education and training in Wales made by the Education and Training Action Group (ETAG) and published in March 1999".

The Committee decided that, in order to form conclusions, it would have to hear views at first hand on the ETAG recommendations. It took oral presentations from ETAG members themselves and from 20 organisations representing the range of different interests involved. A further 34 organisations and individuals submitted written comments. In addition, the Committee held a joint-meeting with the Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee to discuss areas of common interest, and liaised closely with the Economic

Development Committee, whose Chair attended two Committee meetings.

The Committee report was published in December 1999 and was endorsed by plenary in February of this year. The Committee made a number of recommendations; notably, it endorsed ETAG's proposal to establish a National Council for Education and Training, and to establish a national all-age careers service, "Careers Wales", providing information, advice and guidance on learning and career opportunities. However, the Committee also suggested some key amendments and additions to ETAP and recommended that further work be undertaken by the Pre-16 and Economic Development Committees on areas which fell under their respective remits.

Arts and Culture

The terms of reference for this review, as drawn up by a working group of three Committee members are as follows:

"To conduct a study of the current priorities of public funding of the arts in Wales: to consider the objectives of the Assembly in relation to the arts and the extent to which current policies meet these objectives: and to consider the extent to which expenditure on the arts provides a platform for obtaining private sector and European funds. The study, which will concentrate on the arts rather than the built heritage, will pay particular attention to the following themes:

- reinforcing the national identity and international status of Wales;
- promoting social cohesion and active citizenship through widening community access to the arts in Wales;
- improving the quality of life for individuals and communities;
- supporting education and promoting artistic talent throughout Wales;
- the importance of the creative industries to employment in Wales;
- the development of excellence.

The study will focus on public sector support for the arts through sponsored bodies, notably the Arts Council of Wales. It will look at funding mechanisms and consider the roles of local authorities, Higher Education institutions and arts organisations, including the broadcasters. The committee will take oral and written evidence from a wide-range of organisations involved in the arts spectrum".

The working group also recommended that the review merited the appointment of an expert advisor. To this end, Ceri Sherlock was appointed in January.

During the course of the review the Committee has attempted to reach out to the whole of Wales. It has met nine times in Cardiff and held a meeting in each of the four regions. Oral representations have been received from 56 organisations and individuals, representing the

range of art forms. In addition, a large number of written responses have also been received.

The Committee has now completed the evidence-taking process and at its next meeting on 28 June will begin evaluating the responses. The final report is due to be published in September.

The National Library of Wales

As part of its remit overseeing the work of the National Library of Wales and library and archive services in general, the Committee undertook a mini-review of the scope and activities of the National Library of Wales in November 1999.

The Committee received a comprehensive position paper from National Assembly officials prior to visiting the Library on 18 November, where it received informative presentations from Library officials, members of the Court and Council, The Library and Information Services Council (Wales) and the Consortium of the Welsh Library and Information Services. In addition, the Committee separately sought views on the Library's links and partnerships with other sectors and organisations in Wales. The responses indicated an impressive and widespread support for the National Library's activities, but also contained many constructive suggestions for improvement. These were relayed to the Librarian of the National Library in a letter from the Committee Chair.

Higher Education

A review of Higher Education in Wales will provide the major focus of the Committee's activities in the autumn of this year. In March, a working group of Committee members began the process by drawing up the review's terms of reference (shown below). The Committee have decided that the review merits the appointment of an expert advisor. The post has now been advertised and an appointment is likely in July.

The terms of reference are:

"To identify a vision for higher education in Wales and how it should serve the country's needs, and to develop a long-term strategy for optimising the sector's contribution. The study should take account of the National, European, and wider international dimensions involved, together with the various teaching, research, cultural, vocational and economic missions within the sector. The study should address in particular:-

- the range of disciplines and activities within higher education;
- the portfolio of research undertaken within the sector, and the amount and pattern of research funding obtained from the HEFCW, Research Councils and other sources;
- the economic mission of higher education institutions in relation to wealth and job

- creation and the commercial exploitation of knowledge;
- the scope for collaboration and integration within the higher education sector and also partnership between HE institutions and schools, further education institutions and others in order to continually raise standards of both teaching and research;
- student financial support and its affect on the volume and pattern of recruitment;
- the Assembly's statutory powers and any constraints they impose on the strategic development of higher education in Wales.

The policy study should describe the opportunities for strategic development, make recommendations for action and set targets for achievement, having due regard to competing priorities and constraints on resources".

The Welsh Language

The Welsh Language Board (WLB) appeared before the Committee in November 1999 when it presented a comprehensive paper setting out its vision for the future of the language. In February, the Committee formally endorsed the WLB's paper (by a majority of 7-1), as being a major contribution to the task of drawing up a strategy for the continued revitalisation of the Welsh language and the creation of a bilingual Wales.

The Committee will also have considerable input into the Assembly's Welsh Language Scheme. Three Committee members have been nominated to join a working group of officials to help create the Scheme.

The New Deal

The Committee receives bi-annual reports from the Assembly Secretary on the progress of the New Deal and recently met and questioned representatives of the New Deal Task Force.

Other Standing Order Requirements

Scrutiny of Public Bodies (SO 9.7(iii))

The Committee's work in respect of the National Library of Wales and the Welsh Language Board is noted above. During the course of the year, the Committee also met representatives of the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils for Wales and, in the context of its arts and culture review, the National Museum of Wales.

The corporate plans and annual reports of each of the public bodies were analysed in detail by an individual Committee Member and the findings conveyed to the bodies concerned.

Budget (SO 9.8(ii))

The Committee considered the Assembly's draft budget for 2000-01. It was unanimous in its view that a clear message be sent to the Finance Secretary that provision for Education and Training, and Culture and Recreation, should be safeguarded and it identified a number of areas where additional spending is needed. These were:

The Arts in Wales

The Welsh Language

Further and Higher Education

Student Access Funds

The Committee's views were taken into account in the actual budget. The Welsh Language Board received an additional £200,000 over the originally indicated baseline; the Arts Council of Wales received an additional £100,000; student access funds increased by over one-third, whilst the level of funding for both the Further and Higher Education Funding Councils for Wales increased above inflation.

Public Appointments (SO 9.8(iv))

The Committee nominated Cynog Dafis and John Griffiths as its representatives on the Public Appointments Panel.

Other Standing Order requirements

The Committee has not yet advised on proposed legislation affecting Wales, nor has it been required to perform its functions under Standing Order 21 (complaints).

Future Work Programmes

The Committee will to continue to concentrate its efforts on key policy development areas. The inclusive and consultative way the Committee has operated to date, particularly its work on the ETAG and arts and culture policy reviews, appears to have been met with goodwill by many of the organisations and individuals that have contributed to the process. This openness and transparency will continue with the Higher Education review scheduled to begin in October when the key players in the HE field in Wales will be invited to appear before the Committee. The review will provide the main focus of the Committee's work until April 2001. In September, the Committee will decide on work areas for policy reviews post-April 2001.

During the next working year, the Committee will also meet and scrutinise each of the public bodies that come under its remit. It will continue to monitor the progress of the New Deal in Wales; it is also due to meet the Skills Task Force; and, as a follow-up to its review of the ETAP proposals, will meet the National Council for Education and Training to discuss its plans for implementation.

Committee Secretariat June 2000