

Proposals for a Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2008

John Griffiths, Deputy Minister for Skills

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Today is an important milestone in the implementation of our distinctive and groundbreaking policy for 14 to 19-year olds the 14-19 learning pathways. It is entirely appropriate that one of the first Assembly Measures should be concerned with the implementation of a policy that has been developed from the experience and expertise of practitioners from every relevant sector in Wales to meet the needs of young people. With that, I announce the publication of draft proposals for the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2008.

Learning pathways have featured regularly in Education and Lifelong Learning Committee meetings and in Plenary debates, and the guidance has developed since 2002. The draft proposals I propose today underpin that policy, and they will assist in ensuring that all young learners have a better and a wider choice than is currently the case. This will promote equality of opportunity. The process has been a transparent one from the beginning, with a wide range of working groups building on the best practice of what works for learners in Wales. These working groups have involved representatives from all relevant sectors. Each of these representatives was mandated in turn to consult their colleagues in ensuring that the proposals were, at the same time, firmly based on evidence of good practice and sufficiently aspirational to secure world-class provision for Wales's young people. I firmly believe that the proposals contained in this Assembly Measure have the potential to achieve this. The 14-19 learning pathways consist of six key elements that, in combination, are sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of all our learners. The six key elements are: an individual learning pathway; a wide choice of high-quality options; a learning core; learning coach support; access to personal support; and improved impartial specialist careers information, advice and guidance.

Among the most distinctive aspects of 14-19 learning pathways is the attention to wider learning; a theme that is prevalent through the development of the Welsh baccalaureate. This will recognise the enhanced experiences that many of our most advantaged learners enjoy, and it will also secure enhanced experiences for those who may be less fortunate, enabling them to gain the skills, attitudes and values that they need to achieve their potential. The development of such skills, including basic skills, will assist in generating higher participation and attainment. It is an egalitarian policy approach that will address underachievement in all our communities.

The 14-19 networks, based on each local authority area and involving partners from all sectors, are already working hard to implement 14-19 learning pathways. A total of £32.5 million has been made available this year to support the implementation of the policy. Should the proposals for this learning and skills Measure go forward, they will ensure that 14-19 learning pathways will be available equitably across Wales, by setting out an entitlement to learning provision and to learning and personal support.

This Measure will also place a duty on schools, further education institutions, and local authorities to co-operate with each other, and other partners, as a means to secure learners' entitlements to the wide ranging local curriculum. We will use our funding and contractual arrangements with training providers to place similar duties on them in ensuring that all learners can access their entitlements. The proposals also recognise the important co-ordinating role played by local authorities in implementing learning pathways and 'Extending Entitlement'.

The 14-19 learning pathways set out to create a continuous and coherent phase of learning, which recognises the considerable developments and changes that happen to learners over this period in their lives. They set out to encourage all young people to access education and training, and to remain in learning post 16. I believe that our proposals, including our unique blend of support mechanisms, will be effective in securing participation on a voluntary basis.

The proposals that I am announcing today will be backed by powers to make regulations, give directions and issue guidance that will add to the existing 14-19 learning pathways guidance, and which will support the implementation of the Measure. In summary, the draft of the Measure will underpin the implementation of 14-19 learning pathways to secure equality of opportunity for 14-19 learners in Wales; secure learners' entitlement to select from a wide range of courses of study, including academic and vocational options, and with all five domains of learning available; and provide a regulation-making power to define the range of options to be made available to meet learners' entitlements.

Regulations will be introduced to set out the detail of learners' entitlement to select courses of study that contribute to the formal strand of an individual learning pathway. These will set out the minimum number of courses to be made available, and the number of these that should be vocational in nature. We do not envisage that any single learning setting will be able to offer the full range of provision from 14 to 19. Therefore, the Measure includes a duty to consider cooperation with other learning settings to make the required number and range of options available.

On Welsh-medium provision, we will work closely with Welsh-medium and bilingual educators and trainers to ensure a programme of capacity building so that, year on year, more provision can be offered in a choice of languages. In 2008-09, pilot developments in vocational provision through the medium of Welsh are being undertaken across Wales.

To conclude, I trust that Members will study these proposals carefully. They will be the subject of extensive discussion with 14-19 networks, practitioners and young people. I believe that they will support and consolidate the significant developments that are already happening in Wales. This Measure will secure equality of opportunity for learners, raise the game for skills and qualifications in Wales, and support our social and economic growth.