

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE

REPORT TO PLENARY UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.9

Introduction

This is the report of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, in accordance with Standing Order 9.9. It summarises the activity of the committee from the inaugural meeting on 15 November 2000 to the last meeting of the spring term on 4 April 2001. During this period, the committee met twelve times.

Following the Partnership Agreement, the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee took over the responsibilities the Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee and also the Post-16 Education and Training Committee. These latter two committees are now defunct.

Membership

There has been one change to the committee's membership, since it was first elected on 9 November 2000 - Ms Eleanor Burnham replaced Ms Christine Humphreys on 3 April 2001 and attended her first committee meeting the following day.

Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South & Penarth	Labour
Eleanor Burnham	North Wales	Liberal Democrats
Cynog Dafis (Chair)	Mid and West Wales	Plaid Cymru
Jane Davidson (Minister)	Pontypridd	Labour
Janice Gregory	Ogmore	Labour
Pauline Jarman	South Wales Central	Plaid Cymru
Gareth Jones	Conwy	Plaid Cymru
Huw Lewis	Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney	Labour
Jonathan Morgan	South Wales Central	Conservative
Alun Pugh	Clwyd West	Labour

Committee Secretariat

Chris Reading	Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Clerk
Gareth Woodhead	Supporting Officer

Remit

The committee has a broad remit that is based on the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, Ms Jane Davidson AM. This portfolio embraces education and lifelong learning and includes, amongst other things, the national curriculum and qualifications, all aspects of schools administration and organisation, further and higher education, supply side of employment policy - including the New Deal - and the work of the employment service, career services and work related training.

Duties

The Education and Lifelong Learning Committee is one of seven subject committees. The responsibilities of the subject committees are set out in Standing Order 9.7 and these are set out in Annex 1.

Policy Principles

At its meeting on 31 January 2001, the committee considered revising the framework principles for education and training in Wales, which were inherited from the former Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee. It was subsequently determined that these principles were no longer required, as "betterwales.com" set out the (then) administration's framework for education policy in Wales – supplemented after the formation of the coalition administration by "Putting Wales First: A Partnership for the People of Wales". In the former document these are set out in the section on "Better opportunities for learning" and in the latter they are contained in the section on "Education and lifelong learning." The main principles are set out below.

High quality, lifelong, education, available to all of the people of Wales, is our highest priority. Education liberates talents, extends opportunity and helps create wealth.

We will put in place policies to achieve long term and sustained improvement in the quality of education in Wales, with the aim of building one of the best education systems in the World.

The Statutory Schemes

The committee's work took account of the National Assembly's statutory schemes for relations with the local authorities and the voluntary sector, and the sustainable development scheme.

Method of Working

The committee met on a regular basis, once a fortnight during term time. The meetings were usually held in the Assembly Building in Cardiff Bay and were open to the public. In order to make its proceedings more accessible to the people of Wales, the committee held meetings in Aberaeron and Merthyr Tydfil during autumn / winter 2000.

Policy Reviews

The committee inherited the following policy reviews from the two former education committees:

- ❑ Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds;
- ❑ Information and Communication Technology in Education;
- ❑ The Supply of School Places; and
- ❑ Higher Education in Wales

Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds

The committee adopted the following terms of reference for the review:

- ❑ To consider the current pattern of educational provision for 3 year olds;
- ❑ To assess whether its expansion would be in the educational and developmental interests of such children;
- ❑ To assess the costs of such expansion which would place a new burden on local authorities and would need to be recognised in their funding;
- ❑ To assess the impact of expansion on the ability of playgroups and private providers to provide childcare for children below compulsory school age; and
- ❑ To make recommendations to the Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning as to future policy.

Following an open competition, an all-party panel of committee members of the then Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee appointed Mrs Margaret Hanney as their expert adviser.

At its first meeting, the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee established a working group to finalise the report on this topic. The working group comprised Lorraine Barrett, Gareth Jones, Christine Humphreys and Jonathan Morgan.

At its meeting on 13 December 2000, the report was endorsed by the committee. The committee felt that the needs of the child were paramount and that this principle should be central to any subsequent decisions by the Assembly. The priority recommendations of the report were:

- ❑ *That the Minister should commission a survey of the current level of provision and estimates of future demand, which would form the basis for planning the development needs and cost implications;*
- ❑ *That the Minister should consider establishing an Early Years Advisory Panel to advise her on the development of the strategy and its implementation plan;*
- ❑ *That the partnership model for Early Years Education and Childcare be adopted and that local education authorities (LEAs) be supported to create integrated Early Years Centres; and*
- ❑ *That local education authorities and Early Years and Childcare Partnerships should submit plans - with associated cost estimates - for the development of infrastructure, as set out in the model.*

In addition, there were many detailed recommendations covering the issues of staffing, training and qualifications, curriculum, standards of provision and inspection, Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Welsh medium education.

On 6 March 2001, the Chair presented the committee's report – "*Laying the Foundation: Early Years Provision for Three Year Olds*" - to the Minister and

the Assembly in plenary session and the Minister undertook to respond formally in due course.

Information and Communication Technology in Education

The committee adopted the following terms of reference for the review:

Stage 1

To investigate the development of the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) in Wales with a view to:

- Reviewing progress towards the target of linking all schools to the Grid by 2002;
- Considering the scope for greater co-operation between LEAs as they develop their own learning networks with a particular focus on joint procurement; and
- To consider the need for further specialist guidance to LEAs on the most effective networking solutions for schools.

Stage 2

To take forward the findings of Stage 1 by:

- An examination of the merits of developing a National Framework Agreement to support procurement, so as to achieve economies of scale;
- An investigation as to why the NGfL managed service does not meet the needs of Welsh LEAs and to explore with the Association of Directors of Education Wales (ADEW) ways in which this could be improved;
- An exploration with ADEW, ACCAC and other interested parties as to whether the establishment of a National ICT network based in the public sector is feasible for Wales, and the implications in time and resources of establishing such as network;
- An examination of ways to establish greater co-operation across Wales in the development of bilingual educational software that supports the national curriculum;
- A review of the delivery of training in ICT for teachers in Wales and the support available to them on the use of ICT in delivering the national curriculum; and
- Examining the merits of creating a team to develop and maintain the NGfL web site in Wales, so that it meets the needs of teachers in Wales.

Following an open competition, an all-party panel of committee members of the then Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee appointed Mr Neil Harries as their expert adviser.

At the inaugural meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, the expert adviser's draft report was considered and two committee members - Huw Lewis and Jonathan Morgan – were asked to finalise the text. The committee, at its meeting on 17 January 2001, approved the final report.

In accepting the recommendations as a whole, the committee specifically recommended that action should be taken urgently to establish:

- ❑ *An advisory panel for ICT in schools, with a precise three year development brief for ICT in schools in Wales;*
- ❑ *An ICT task force as an arm's length team to carry out the three year development programme for ICT in schools; and*
- ❑ *A National Grid for Learning (NGfL, Cymru) to provide all appropriate curriculum services, planned, designed and tailored to the needs of schools in Wales, working in both English and Welsh languages.*

On 13 March 2001, the Chair, Huw Lewis and Jonathan Morgan presented the committee's report – "*Information and Communication Technology in Education*" - to the Minister and the Assembly in plenary session and the Minister undertook to respond formally in due course.

The Supply of School Places

The committee adopted the following terms of reference for the review:

To look at the provision of school places, in particular the level of unfilled places, with a view to:

- ❑ Establishing the optimum level of unfilled places, allowing for flexibility;
- ❑ Determining the costs of retaining levels of surplus places in excess of this; and
- ❑ Identifying the action local authorities need to take to effectively manage their stocks of school places.

The committee inherited this review from the now defunct Pre-16 Education, Schools and Early Learning Committee.

In the first meeting of the new committee, it was noted that this review was of a more technical nature compared with others in progress. Members agreed to consider carefully how the review could best be taken forward, after hearing the oral submissions.

To date, the committee has held two meetings concerned solely with this review and has received oral submissions from The Audit Commission, Welsh Local Government Association, Small Schools Association, Estyn, Welsh Language Board and The Diocesan Schools Authorities.

The Audit Commission has inspected ten LEAs in Wales concerning this matter and is due to submit its report to the Minister in the near future. The committee will take account of this independent report in its deliberations. The Chair will present the final report to the Assembly in plenary on 10th July.

Review of Higher Education in Wales

The committee adopted the following terms of reference for the review:

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; and
- ❑ 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 committee inherited this review from the now defunct Post-16 Education and Training Committee. Following an open competition, an all-party panel of committee members appointed Professor Les Hobson as their expert adviser.

With the help of the expert adviser, the committee identified the following six key themes: -

- ❑ Size and Shape of Higher Education;
- ❑ Learning and Teaching;
- ❑ Economic, Social and Cultural Regeneration;
- ❑ Research;
- ❑ Funding; and
- ❑ Accountability / Quality

Having identified the six key themes and their associated issues, questionnaires were sent to a variety of organisations from within and without the Principality. The consultation was undertaken between 22 September and 11 November 2000, during which over 80 written responses were received. At its meeting on 31 January 2001, the committee considered a preliminary analysis by the expert adviser of these responses. A wide variety of detailed

comments were received on the six key themes and related issues. The more important general comments were summarised as follows: -

Higher Education (HE) is a huge global market, which is changing rapidly. Major changes have been: -

- ❑ *The move from a small elitist market to mass participation in HE;*
- ❑ *Student funding arrangements and the consequent perception of the student as a consumer;*
- ❑ *A move from traditional forms of passive delivery of knowledge to a student-centred approach – facilitated by developments in Information and Communications Technology (ICT); and*
- ❑ *The emergence of new providers of HE in the form of company universities and private for-profit organisations.*

On 5 December 2000, the Minister announced that she had established an Investigation Group - Chaired by Professor Teresa Rees - to carry out an independent review of student hardship. The Minister confirmed that the Investigation Group would give a presentation to the committee, as part of the HE review. The Chair noted this ministerial announcement but proposed that student hardship should also remain within the remit of the HE review. The committee endorsed this proposal.

The committee, with the help of the expert adviser, prepared a timetable for the HE review, which covered the 12 months from November 2000 to November 2001 - by which time it is intended that the Chair would present the committee's report to the Assembly.

In addition to the six key themes identified initially, the committee has added the issues of 'Governance' and 'Welsh Medium Provision'. The committee is currently hearing oral evidence and to date has received presentations on four of the key themes from a number of stakeholders - including senior academics representing a wide cross-section of HE institutions throughout Wales, the National Union of Students and the Welsh Development Agency.

The committee intends visiting Northern Ireland and Scotland in June, to learn at first-hand the experiences of delivering and funding HE in these countries.

Further Contribution to Policy Development

In addition to conducting its own policy reviews, the committee contributed to the following policy developments being taken forward by the Minister and her officials: -

- ❑ Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST)
- ❑ Report of the Wales Skill Task Force
- ❑ Special Education Needs Pilot Projects
- ❑ General Teaching Council

At its meeting on 4 April 2001, the committee agreed to contribute to the review of the Welsh language – to be carried out by the Culture Committee.

This has been included in the strategic forward work programme, although the remit and programming is to be decided in due course.

Scrutiny of the Minister

The Minister presented a report to the committee each month on policy initiatives, consultations, expenditure and other matters. The topics to be covered in each report were discussed and agreed in advance by the Chair and the Minister. The committee questioned the Minister on her report - for about 45 minutes - and when necessary, further clarification was sought on particular issues. In this way, the committee fulfilled its obligations under Standing Order 9.7.

Review of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs)

At its meeting on 21 March 2001, the committee received a presentation from Ms Susan Lewis, HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales, concerning her recently published annual report. This covered the period from September 1999 to August 2000 and summarised the main evidence discovered by Estyn during its inspections of nursery settings, schools, colleges and other bodies. Following her presentation, the Chief Inspector answered questions from the committee concerning the findings of the report and the consequent policy implications. Estyn is not an ASPB but works closely with the Assembly in providing evidence upon which to develop and monitor education policies. The committee therefore takes a keen interest in Estyn's work.

ACCAC (the Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales), and ELWa (the new National Council for Education and Training for Wales) are due to appear before the committee later this year.

Legislation

During the reporting period, the committee was not invited to scrutinise any draft legislation in accordance with Standing Order 22.

Budget

At the inaugural meeting of the committee the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning introduced the Draft Budget for the three years 2001 to 2004, as tabled by the Minister for Finance and Communities. The Minister stated that she was pleased to inherit a positive budget that increased resources in education and training substantially over the three-year period. The committee were content with the proposed budget, subject to further clarification on: -

- How of the extra funding available for education was calculated;
- An analysis of HE funding in Wales, England and Scotland; and
- Performance management for teachers.

Complaints

No complaints were referred to the committee under the procedure outlined in Standing Order 21.

Public Appointments

The committee, at its meeting on 29 November 2000, nominated Jane Davidson, Cynog Dafis and Lorraine Barrett as its representatives on the Public Appointments Panel. These members, either individually or collectively, were involved in appointments to the following bodies: -

- Higher Education Funding Council; and
- National Council for Education and Training (ELWa)

Forward Programme

Standing Order 9.9 requires the subject committee to maintain a rolling programme of work covering periods of at least 12 months. The committee, at its meeting on 31 January 2001, approved the strategic work programme and this was copied to the Chairs of the other subject committees. It has been amended to include a review of the educational aspects the Welsh language policy, which will form part of Culture Committee's review of this topic.

Committee Secretariat

Annex 1

Duties of Subject Committees (Standing Order 9.7)

Each subject committee shall: -

- *Contribute to the development of the Assembly's policies within the fields for which the relevant Assembly Secretary is accountable to the Assembly;*
- *Keep under review the expenditure and administration connected with their implementation; and*
- *Keep under review the discharge of public functions in those fields by public, voluntary and private bodies.*

Each subject committee shall also, within the relevant fields: -

- *Advise on proposed legislation affecting Wales, including performing its functions under SO22;*
- *Provide advice to the Assembly Cabinet on matters relating to allocation of the Assembly's budget in accordance with Standing Order 19;*
- *Perform its function under Standing Order 21 (complaints);*
- *Perform any functions assigned to it under the Code of Practice on Public Appointments Procedure made by the Assembly under Standing Order 20; and*
- *Consider matters referred to it by the Assembly within its fields.*