

EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE**ASSEMBLY MINISTER'S REPORT TO THE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 19 DECEMBER 2002.**

Amongst other things, this report updates the Committee on the specific issues upon which it wished to be kept informed since my previous report of 21 November 2002. **Annex A** sets out my major engagements since the last report.

1. BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

On 29 November I attended a meeting of the Business Partnership Council, chaired by the First Minister. There was a substantial and very constructive discussion of skills and workforce development issues, which our business partners consider to be one of the major factors in GDP growth and competitiveness. The CBI and Wales TUC presented a joint paper on these issues - an historic paper in that this is the first time these organisations have collaborated in this way. They set out a joint approach to improving performance and raising skills levels, building on the analysis of Future Skills Wales. Other members of the Business Partnership Council support the approach and I would like to develop this valuable initiative by drawing up a joint agreement involving ELWa and the Assembly Government.

2. CAREERS WALES EVENTS

On 6 November, I attended the Careers Wales West Conference on Careers Education and Guidance in the Halliwell Centre, Trinity College Carmarthen. On 8 November I opened the new Youth Gateway premises in Caerphilly, operated by Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan, serving the Rhymney Valley area. And on 25 November I made the keynote speech at the first Careers Wales National Conference.

This range of events is indicative of the impact that Careers Wales is making locally and nationally. As we seek to develop a holistic all-age careers advice and guidance service, it is essential that Careers Wales effectively markets its services locally, whether within the education sector professionals, or with young people having difficulty in engaging with Education, Employment or Training. At a national level Careers Wales has a role to bring its expertise to our developing Made-in-Wales agenda. To that end, I was particularly pleased that the first Careers Wales National Conference focused on the Learning Country; Learning Pathways 14-19 consultation. A range of partners from business and the voluntary sector attended as well as from education and training. I shall look forward to the responses from this event adding a valuable perspective to the consultation process.

Careers Wales also launched a brochure 'Made-in-Wales –a celebration of Youth Gateway' for which I was pleased to contribute the Foreword. The Youth Gateway was initiated in September 1999 and in its first 2 years over

7,000 young clients have received individually tailored support from Gateway advisers. Youth Gateway is an important element of the suite of services being developed distinctively in Wales – and I look forward to Young People’s Partnerships looking to Youth Gateway as an important resource in helping young people make effective transitions.

In November the Careers Wales Association signed a contract with a consortium headed by Illumina Ltd to develop Careers Wales Online – the interactive Web-based careers advice service that was a key objective set-out in The Learning Country. Careers Wales staff, at all levels, will work with the development team to create a distinctively Welsh product. I am particularly pleased that the project plan looks at embedding bilingualism in its development from the outset – and not as an add-on or afterthought. When Careers Wales Online goes live early in 2004 I look to it making a real impact.

3. WOODLANDS FOR LEARNING CONFERENCE

On 2nd December I addressed the first Woodlands for Learning Conference at Llandrindod Wells, one of the biggest outdoor education events ever held in Wales, which was hosted by the Forestry Commission. I also presented a plaque to Cwmlai Primary School, Rhondda Cynon Taff following their performance of a play entitled “Our Forest for the Future”.

The Forestry Commission arranged this conference to celebrate recent achievements and to strengthen links between practitioners. 160 delegates from Wales and beyond heard about the newly expanded Forest Enterprise Education Service, the Forest Education Initiative, Forest School Wales and of the work of the Assembly’s Education for Sustainable Development Panel.

The Assembly woodlands form the biggest land estate in Wales and are managed by Forest Enterprise. Beginning with schools in Communities First areas, the **Forest Enterprise Education Service** is providing opportunities to all school across Wales to enable them to use this unique learning resource through a range of activities linked to the curriculum.

The Forest Education Initiative (FEI) is a partnership facilitated by the Forestry Commission on behalf of the partners: The Timber Trade Federation, the Forest Industries Development Council, The Tree Council and the Woodland Trust. It aims to support people and organisations delivering forest education through a network of local cluster groups. These groups have a range of partners including forest rangers, teachers, woodland owners, local authorities and environmental charities. FEI projects involve a range of ages and settings.

Forest School encourages an appreciation of the natural world and builds self-esteem and confidence through regular visits to special woodland sites. Forest School Wales is an association of members working on Forest School projects across the Principality.

In the afternoon delegates attended a series of workshops on such diverse topics as Creating Woodland Settings in School Grounds, Bringing the Global Dimension to Forest Education and Forests for the Future Primary Project.

Response to this conference was so enthusiastic that many had to be turned away because of lack of space. This demand has persuaded me to plan a further conference next year. In 2003 we will base our conference on the Successful *Talking Trees* Children's Conference held this year in Derbyshire

4. REACHING HIGHER

Since the publication of *Reaching Higher*, I have been working with HEFCW to deliver the early stages of the strategy. Progress in delivering *Reaching Higher* will be a substantive agenda item next term. In the meantime I wanted to update you on what has been happening.

In July, I issued additional guidance to the Council on the use of the funding that I announced in support of reconfiguration and widening access – my initial priorities for the sector. HEFCW subsequently issued an invitation for bids for reconfiguration and for collaborative widening access initiatives. The deadline for bids was 31 October. HEFCW have received bids and are in the process of considering them. HEFCW has convened panels, which have met and put proposals to the full Council on 6 December. An Assembly official represented me, in an observer capacity, on these panels. I expect shortly to receive the Council's recommendations for allocating the Reaching Higher reconfiguration and widening access funding which the Assembly has set aside for 2002-03.

I am also in the process of visiting each institution in Wales to discuss their collaborative plans. During these visits, I am taking the opportunity to meet governors, representatives of staff and students as well as vice chancellors. The reconfiguration proposals reflect quite radical changes in our institutions, and it is important that a wide spread of interests is involved. It would not be sufficient for me to hold a dialogue with Principals and Vice Chancellors. I am halfway through my programme of visits and I am heartened by the early evidence of progress that I have seen. I will be making my overall assessment available to the Finance Minister, in the run up to the supplementary budget in March and will of course keep you informed of developments.

5. IAITH PAWB : A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR A BILINGUAL WALES

The education and training aspects of the Action Plan are to be found in Chapter 4 of *Iaith Pawb*. A copy is attached at Annex B.

The Action Plan was published and debated in plenary on 27 November, and considered by the Culture Committee on 4 December. Because the agenda for the 5 December meeting of the Education and Lifelong Learning

Committee was already settled, this is the first opportunity for the Committee to consider the Plan in detail.

In order to maximise the time available to Committee members I do not intend to go through the education and training chapter in detail in my Report. However, members of the Committee may find it useful to have a summary of the additional funding which is being made available to support specific priorities within the Plan :

- an additional £7 million in support of bilingual nursery education in 2004-06. This will produce additional training practitioners capable of delivering Welsh medium nursery provision to additional children by September 2006;
- doubling the Welsh medium incentive supplement in support of teachers training through the medium of Welsh to £230,000 from 2004-05;
- an extra £1 million in 2005-06 to fund language learning sabbaticals for teachers at all stages of education, and to support SEN practitioners, from 2005-06;
- an extra £400,000 per annum from 2004-05 onwards in support of ACCAC providing classroom materials and other curriculum support for the language.
- an additional £1 million for non-HE post 16 education from 2005-06 to support Welsh-medium training, sabbaticals and improvement to Welsh for Adults provision.

These measures need to be looked at alongside some of the other initiatives included in the Action Plan – not least the additional £1 million for Twf and the £3 million towards the work of *athrawon bro* because both will have direct or indirect effects on the education agenda.

On top of this, I have secured new money from 2003-04 to fund pilot projects to establish second entry points into Welsh-medium education. The total over 3 years is about £735,000. This figure was included in the published budget and is separate from the additional funding listed above.

6. INTENSIVE LANGUAGE PILOT PROJECT

The Committee will recall that I visited Newfoundland and New Brunswick in September 2002 to view models of intensive language teaching. The Report of my visit was tabled at Committee when it started its contribution to the Policy review of Welsh.

I indicated at that time that I had referred the Report to a group of experts, chaired by the Welsh Language Board, to examine whether the Intensive Core French model observed in Newfoundland could, with suitable

adaptation, be implemented in Wales to provide a second entry point into Welsh-medium education. The possible outcomes include :

- ◆ making the transition into a Welsh-medium secondary school;
- ◆ studying more subjects through the medium of Welsh in a bilingual or predominantly English-medium secondary school setting than would otherwise have been the case; or
- ◆ achieving a sufficiently strong base of linguistic proficiency so as to be able to participate in a much wider range of Welsh language educational and social activities in, and outside, school

A recommendation about pilot projects to increase the number of entry points into Welsh-medium education was included in *Our Language : Its Future*. It is also one of the commitments given by the Welsh Assembly Government in *Iaith Pawb*.

I have now received the advice, and discussed it with the chair of the group. We concluded that the most fruitful models for piloting in the first phase would be intensive language courses:

- in Year 6 between mid-May and mid July ; and
- in any one of Years 3, 4 or 5

In this latter model the start time for the intensive language teaching would be September but the duration would vary according to the Year it is applied. For instance, a pilot in Year 3 or Year 4 could extend from September to July, whereas in Year 5 it could be either from September to May or from September to December

Work is now in hand for the detailed scoping of the pilots, and to identify schools who would be interested in participating from September 2003.

7. ALG'S: PROGRESS ON DISTRIBUTION

2002/03 update: Major progress was made early last month when agreement was reached with the Department for Work and Pensions that ensured the Assembly Learning Grant is now being completely disregarded in respect of those students who are in receipt of State benefits. The ALG scheme had always defined the purpose of the grant as being to help our least well of students to meet the cost they incur whilst attending their courses. A relevant amending regulation was made, and came into force on 15 November. All AMs have been sent details of this statutory instrument

DWP immediately issued new guidance to local benefits offices throughout Wales, and to local government housing departments to confirm the position. I held urgent meetings with student representatives, student support officers

and LEA awards officers to ensure that the message was being received. The Citizens Advice Bureau has also been fully briefed about the changes.

It was apparent that many students – in Further Education in particular - had been put off applying for, or taking up their ALG entitlement. This was borne out by the first set of data submitted by LEAs in November, covering the period up to the end of October, which showed that the take up of ALGs by the HE sector was broadly in line with expectations, but significantly below target in FE. A concerted drive has therefore been organised to persuade these students to apply for or take up their ALGs. The institutions and LEAs are working together on this and are being assisted by the NUS.

The only other area where the scheme has encountered difficulties so far concerns the software packages being used by some of the LEAs. The LEAs were asked to help develop the scheme and to administer it on the Assembly's behalf because they already have in place a means-testing mechanism and considerable expertise in administering student support. The LEAs currently use a variety of software packages to carry out the means-test – although they will soon be moving to a single system as part of DfES's modernisation programme. Some of these packages have proved problematical this year; and not only in delivering the ALG. In some LEAs, the ALG application has highlighted problems in with the software. The LEAs have been working with their software providers, and the last problems had been ironed out by early November.

ALG 2003/04: Having announced in February this year that an ALG scheme was to be introduced, and having secured the LEAs' agreement that they would help us to develop a scheme for September 2002, a general publicity campaign was launched in July. The scheme's first year has been treated as a pathfinder, both in terms of administration and public awareness. The advisory group – made up of the FE and HE sectors and the LEAs – is currently reviewing these aspects of the scheme. They have recommended that the start of the publicity campaign for the 2003/04 scheme should coincide with the beginning of the LEAs outreach programme, when their student awards officers begin their visits to schools and colleges, which is also when the colleges begin their own publicity campaigns. I therefore propose to launch the 2003/04 publicity programme in co-operating with the institutions and LEAs at the end of February or early in March. Initially this will involve a media launch accompanied by the availability of literature for distribution by the LEAs, Institutions, NUS, and the Assembly. Between then and the start of the Autumn term in September – October 2003 there will be periodic bursts of publicity to coincide with key dates in the academic calendar.

8. GWYNFRYN SITE

As part of the overall redevelopment of Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn as a regional centre of excellence for autism for North Wales, I have instated the necessary procedures under Standing Order 19 to allow us to gift the Gwynfryn site to the Brondyffryn Trust for the provision of the necessary ancillary facilities.

9. EARLALL FLORENCE FORUM

At the end of last week I attended a conference in Florence organised by the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning of which Wales is a founder member. The conference reflected on the experiences of six of the member regions in 'valorising' (i.e. testing the transferability) various products of the European Union's Leonardo da Vinci programme. In Wales, ELWa has been using the output of some work undertaken in Finland a few years ago under the Leonardo programme to help formulate its own strategic approach to the objective of achieving parity of esteem between academic and vocational learning. This work involved a workshop seminar in Cardiff at the end of November and has resulted in a report which an ELWa official presented to the Florence conference. I shall ensure that it is made available to ELL Committee members and placed on the Assembly and ELWa websites in due course.

The 'valorisation' project was supported by funding from the European Commission who were keen to test the process of valorisation itself. I think we can expect this to become a feature of EU special programme funding requirements in due course to encourage dissemination of the results of specific developments supported by those programmes. European Commission officials were at the conference along with delegates from many regions of Europe and some representatives of Member State governments.

Indeed, the conference marked a major milestone in the development of the Association which has expanded to some 15 member regions during its first 12 months - and we can expect further expansion as a result of this significant event. I and a number of other Ministers from regional governments made speeches which underlined the importance of networking, disseminating different approaches and benchmarking against best practice, not only within Europe but looking outside to the wider world as well. We looked ahead to the expansion of the European Union, to the future development of the EU's education, training and youth programmes and stressed the role that the regions, acting together, could play in "Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning A Reality".

Annex A

Minister's Engagements from 22nd November – 19th December 2002

22nd November

ATTEND – Present Award for 'Woman as entrepreneur' Welsh Woman of the Year Awards 2002

24th November

SPCH - Shakespeare School Drama Festival

25th November

MTG - Llandrindod High School re: Alternative Curriculum

SPCH - Open Careers Wales Conference

MTG – PAT

MTG - NUT

26th November

MTG - Teenage Mums

MTG - NASUWT

27th November

MTG - Merion Prys-Jones & Keith Davies re: Immersion & Intensive Language

Teaching: Pilot Projects

ATTEND - EARLALL Valorisation seminar

SPCH - Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification Pilot Centres Conference

SPCH - Chwarae Teg Conference

VISIT - Green Flag Raising Ceremony at Troedyrhiw Infants School

MTG - Bilateral with Jane Hutt AM

28th November

SPCH - NPQH Award Ceremony

PARTICIPATE - Education Debate HTV's 'The Sharp End'

29th November

ATTEND -Business Partnership Council Meeting

ATTEND - Association of Early Years Advisors National Meeting

2nd December

SPCH - Open 'Woodlands for Learning Conference'

PRESENT - Basic Skills Quality Award to Coleg Powys

INTERVIEW - John Davies re: 'My Best Teacher'

3rd December

MTG - Mary McAleese, Irish President

MTG - Gerald Davies (Chair of Wales Youth Agency)

SPCH - Women in Education Network 'Christmas Indian Extravaganza'

4th December

VISIT - University of Wales, Aberystwyth

VISIT - University of Wales, Swansea

MTG - Clive Grace Director of Wales Audit Commission

5th December

PHOTOCALL – GTCW
SPCH - SHA Cymru Conference

6th December

SPCH - Open North Wales Vocational Education Conference for School Senior Managers

9th December

ATTEND - Rhondda Cynon Taff CCET Mtg
MTG - Members of HEW

10th December

SPCH - Members of GTCW Council
SPCH - Closing Ceremony Wales Science Year

11th December

VISIT - Swansea College
VISIT - Swansea Institute of Higher Education
SPCH - Present Awards at South East Wales Open College Network AGM

12th December

MTG - HEFCW Re: Reconfiguration Bids
VISIT - St David's College
SPCH - Launch PLUS Initiative - Glamorgan University School's Programme

13th December

SPCH - EARLALL 'Leonardo Conference'

14th December

SPCH - EARLALL 'Leonardo Conference'

16th December

VISIT - Welsh College of Horticulture
VISIT - Coleg Lllysfasi
VISIT- Attend Awards Ceremony at Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor
VISIT - Lampeter College

17th December

SPCH - Launch of 'Guidelines for Counselling in School' British Association for Counselling & Psychology

18th December

VISIT - Carneton Primary School

19th December

MTG - Working Lunch with Chief Executive and Chair's of the GTCW