

North Wales Regional Committee

Fourth report: The new national planning and funding system for post 16 education in Wales

Introduction

1.1 The North Wales Regional Committee is one of the Assembly's four regional committees. It covers Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Isle of Anglesey, Wrexham and the area of Gwynedd made up of the former districts of Arfon and Dwyfor.

1.2 The role of the regional committees, as defined by Standing Order 10.2, is to advise the National Assembly on matters affecting their regions, the effect of Assembly policies in those regions and the work of public bodies there.

1.3 At its meeting on 30 January 2004 the Committee sought the views of the North Wales public on the new national planning and funding system for post 16 education in Wales. The points raised are summarised in this report.

Key messages

1.4 The key messages to arise from the meeting were as follows:

- The impact of the new system on the viability of sixth forms in North Wales, and Welsh medium provision in particular. Many of those present at the meeting expressed concern that the new funding system would lead to a centralised provision of sixth form education in further education colleges;
- Confirmation of funding in time to facilitate planning. For example, this year local education authorities had been required to submit proposed school budgets to the Assembly before they had been notified by ELWa of their sixth form allocations;
- Public accountability of ELWa; several contributors referred to ELWa as an organisation that did not listen to, or understand, their concerns.

1.5 Concern was also expressed about the about the continued funding of Learning Challenge Fund projects in North Wales.

Presentations

1.6 At the meeting the Committee heard short presentations as follows, copies are reproduced in Annexes 1-3.

- Elaine Allinson, Head of Funding Policy and Special Projects, ELWa, outlined the new system and set out the timetable for its implementation (Annex 1);
- Huw Evans, Principal of Coleg Llandrillo (and Chair of Fforwm) outlined the challenges faced by the further education sector in North Wales and issues to be addressed through the new planning and funding system (Annex 2);
- Meurig Rees, Headteacher of Ysgol Glan Clwyd, gave a sixth form perspective. He emphasised the importance of: certainty and transparency of funding, if schools were to plan ahead effectively; choice between Welsh and English medium education; listening to the views of teachers, parents and pupils (Annex 3).

Views of the North Wales public

1.7 Points raised by members of the public were as follows:

- Cllr Rhiannon Hughes, Denbighshire County Council raised concerns about budget planning; this year local education authorities had been required to submit proposed school budgets to the Assembly before they had been notified by ELWa of their sixth form allocations. She also sought assurances about continued funding of Learning Challenge Fund projects in Denbighshire, as it was understood that the Fund had been discontinued. ELWa confirmed that it was required to notify local authorities of their sixth form allocations by the end of January, but was looking at timing for future years. On the Learning Challenge Fund, ELWa were proceeding with contracts undertaken and committed, and would be in discussions with partners about projects;
- Cllr George Johnson, Colwyn Town Council, asked whether the disparities in the salaries of teachers and lecturers would be funded from teaching resource allocations. ELWa said that some £11 million had been earmarked to reduce the gap between lecturers and teachers pay;
- Stewart Davies, Parent Governor of Ysgol Dinas Bran, asked who would meet the cost of works already undertaken on the understanding that Learning Challenge Fund monies were forthcoming;
- Geraint Roberts, Vice Chair of the Wales Governors' Federation was disappointed that ELWa had not met with the Federation;
- Andrea Miller, Senior Education Officer, Welsh Language Board, asked when the report on the cost of bilingual teaching commissioned by ELWa would be published, and whether recent centralisation of agricultural provision would follow for other disciplines. ELWa was working with partners to identify 'networks of excellence' across a range of disciplines. Further work was being undertaken on costs of bilingual education, which would be reflected in the pricing model;
- David Jones, Chairman of Denbighshire CCET, wanted the Committee to be aware that no conditions had been associated with the Learning Challenge Fund allocations for Denbighshire, and that they had been let down at the last minute;
- Sioned Bowen, Director of Lifelong Learning, Denbighshire County Council, and Chair of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales, asked whether the Association would be

involved in planning at local authority level;

- Liz Saville asked about progress with supporting bilingual education;
- Dewi Johns, Headteacher of Ysgol Dyffryn Nantlle, asked the Committee to comment on recent reports that it would be cheaper to close school sixth forms and provide centralised post 16 education in further education colleges;
- Adam Stephens, Vice President of Yale College Student Liaison Committee, raised the disparity of funding per pupil in England in Wales;
- Bethan Richardson, Head Girl of Ysgol Dinas Bran, expressed concern at the withdrawal of the Learning Challenge Fund and the effect this would have on planned facilities at her school;
- Marilyn Raine, Headteacher of Ysgol Dinas Bran, said that uncertainties about funding meant it was difficult for schools to plan ahead. The withdrawal of the Learning Challenge Fund would impact the wider community who used its facilities, as well as the pupils;
- Peter Shaw, Headteacher of Rhiwabon School, asked the Committee to guarantee that no sixth form in Wales would close;
- Cllr Dafydd Jones, Denbighshire County Council, said that nobody would benefit from the current situation;
- Terry Jones, acting Chair of the National Training Federation for Wales, was concerned that work based learning provision had not been addressed at the meeting. He asked when the new work-based tendering system would be operational;
- John Gambles, Welsh Secondary Schools Association, questioned the need for two organisations – ELWa and local authorities – to fund post 16 education;
- Dafydd Whittall, Cyngor Gwynedd, felt that the Assembly and ELWa needed to work more coherently together;
- Dafydd Fôn Williams, Headteacher of Ysgol Sir Huw Owen, Caernarfon, warned that it would not be ELWa or the Assembly closing sixth forms, but school governors because of lack of funding;
- Neil Foden, Headteacher of Friars School, Bangor, said that little of the planning and funding system had changed as a result of consultation. He expressed concerns about the future funding of sixth forms and called on the Assembly to do something to restore confidence in the system;
- Sian Davies, Fforwm, asked if the proposed planning and funding system would promote collaboration between schools and further education colleges, which would in turn benefit the learner by increasing their choices;
- Geoff Mason, Headteacher of the Maelor School, was concerned that budget cuts would lead to the closure of sixth forms, and risk learners leaving post 16 education all together;
- Eurfryn Davis stressed the importance of ELWa having an office in North Wales, as it was staffed by bilingual officers;
- Cllr Meirick Davies, Denbighshire, asked why the presentation slides used were not bilingual;
- Beatrice Williams, a parent, expressed concern about the management of ‘quangos’ and asked why individual learning accounts were being introduced in Wales, but not in England;
- Peter Clarke, Wales TUC, said it was essential that teachers and lecturers spoke with one voice through their trade unions;
- Cllr Bob Barton, Llanarmon-yn-Ial Community Council, stressed the need to consider lifelong learning, in particular the continuing education of very mature students. He raised the inequality

- of fee rebates; 50% reduction at age 65 penalised female pensioners;
- Ian Miller, Chief Executive Denbighshire Council, encouraged the Assembly's Education and Lifelong Learning Committee to scrutinise the draft regulations that would set out ELWa's authority in relation to sixth forms. The Chair confirmed that the regulations were on the agenda of a future meeting of the ELL Committee.

Written comments

1.8 Written comments were submitted at or following the meeting, and are reproduced in the Annexes. The main points raised were as follows:

- Jasbir Dmesi asked for background to comments made by the a committee member about tertiary education in Wrexham;
- Cllr Sophia Drew emphasised the importance of funding education, and said the no confidence was being shown in the Welsh Assembly Government and ELWA, who had not taken the views of teachers into account;
- Neil Foden, Headteacher of Friars School, Bangor, setting out the comments he made at the meeting;
- Tim Guy of Yale College asked about the research undertaken into the cost of post-16 provision and what ELWa and the Welsh Assembly Government would do if actual costs were greater than allocations;
- Malcolm James suggested that funding be made available for private sector companies to attend regional committee meetings;
- David Jones, Chairman of Denbighshire CCET, setting out the points he raised during the meeting;
- Godfrey Northam asked why the presentation slides used were not bilingual and said this was of concern, as ELWa was responsible for Welsh medium education;
- Beatrice Williams thanked the Committee for the opportunity to air her views and reiterated the points she made at the meeting.

Action taken

1.9 The Chair would put the key concerns arising from the meeting to the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning. This would include the request from the audience to guarantee that no sixth forms in Wales would close as a result of the new planning and funding system.

Next steps

1.10 This report will be submitted to the National Council - ELWa, the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning and copied to the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee.

Janet Ryder AM

Committee Chair

A copy of this report is available on the National Assembly website www.wales.gov.uk If you would like a hard copy, please email NWales.regcomm@wales.gsi.gov.uk or contact Silvia Ricondo on 029 2089 8018.

Annexes

Presentations

Elaine Allinson, ELWa (Annex 1)

Huw Evans, Principal, Coleg Llandrillo (Annex 2)

Meurig Rees, Headteacher, Ysgol Glan Clwyd (Annex 3)

Written comments (hard copies only)

Jasbir Dmesi (Annex 4)

Cllr Sophia Drew (Annex 5)

Tim Guy (Annex 6)

Malcolm James (Annex 7)

David Jones (Annex 8)

Godfrey Northam (Annex 9)

Beatrice Williams (Annex 10)