

Local Government & Public Services Committee

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Electoral Arrangements in Wales Information on Current Initiatives on Education and Participation for Feb 9th Committee

Introduction

This paper aims to provide information on relevant policy areas within the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to ensure that these elements are fully taken account of in the report of the Scrutiny Project.

The School Curriculum – Personal and Social Education

Background

The main area of the curriculum for providing general education on the democratic process for all pupils is Personal and Social Education. PSE was made a part of the Basic Curriculum from September 2003, which means that its delivery is statutory in all schools but without there being a requirement for it to be formally assessed.

The delivery of PSE is governed by the PSE Framework. This sets out a range of learning outcomes for pupils in each of the 4 key stages. The learning outcomes are split into 3 categories: Attitudes and Values; Skills; and Knowledge and Understanding. Knowledge and Understanding is further split into 10 Aspects, of which the Community Aspect is the most relevant for the purpose of this paper.

The learning outcomes within the Community Aspect of the PSE Framework are as follows:

Key Stage 1

- Know about the variety of groups to which they belong and understand the diversity of roles that people play in those groups.
- Understand that they can take on some responsibility in their friendship groups.

Key Stage 2

- Know about aspects of their cultural heritage in Wales including the multi-cultural dimension.
- Understand the importance of democratic decision-making and involvement and how injustice and inequality affect people's lives.

Key Stage 3

- Understand the nature of local, national and international communities with reference to cultural diversity, justice, law and order and interdependence.
- Understand the issues relating to democracy in Wales and know the rights and responsibilities of a young citizen.
- Know how representatives (MEPs, MPs, Members of the National Assembly, Councillors etc) are elected and what their roles are.

For Key Stage 4

- Know how democratic systems work and understand how individual citizens, public opinion, lobby groups, and the media can contribute and have an influence and impact.
- Understand how Government evolves and affects individuals.
- Have a developing global awareness of contemporary issues and events including human rights and sustainable development.

The Framework is intended to allow flexibility for schools to deliver PSE in a way which suits their needs and available resources – both within the school and the local community. Schools may deliver PSE through separate lessons, other elements of the curriculum or other school activities and most commonly a combination of these approaches. Schools are expected to provide a balance of learning outcomes from within the Framework and to assign a member of staff as the PSE Coordinator to ensure that this takes place.

Current and Future Initiatives

Review of the PSE Framework

The whole of the curriculum is currently in the process of being revised with a view to its introduction in

September 2008. This will include a revision to the PSE Framework. It is intended that a revised Framework will be issued for consultation early in 2007. The revision will include strengthening a number of elements to reflect the Assembly Government's increasing emphasis on these aspects, which include:

- Active citizenship and pupil participation in decision making;
- Children and young people's entitlements, rights and responsibilities; and
- Education for sustainable development and global citizenship

Teaching Packs and Resources on the National Assembly for Wales

Materials for primary and secondary schools to teach pupils about the role and structure of the National Assembly for Wales were distributed to all schools in 2003 and are available on the National Assembly for Wales' internet site. The secondary PSE materials are currently being revised. Links below:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/pubinfeducationinfoprimary/index.htm>

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/pubinfeducationinfosecondary/index.htm>

Hansard guidance – AMs in Schools

Hansard have recently (November 2005) developed guidance for schools on how to make the most of an AM's visit to a school. AMs in Schools is a bilingual resource pack which helps teachers, students and elected representatives work towards a successful AM visit to their school, and provides teachers with an informative and innovative way for young people to get a taste of democracy. This project was piloted with support from the Electoral Commission's New Initiatives Fund. AMs in Schools is supported by HSBC and can be downloaded free.

<http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/publications/resources>

The Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) Strategy

A key part of the Welsh Assembly Government's approach to PSE is to ensure that sustainability issues and a wider view of the planet's societies and resources are uppermost in young people's minds. To support this aim a strategy to promote ESDGC in all sectors of education was issued for consultation at the end of 2005, with a view to developing the final strategy in Spring 2006.

Participation

Background

The Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that all children and young people aged 0-25 have opportunities to contribute to, and have their voices heard on decisions which it takes and can influence on issues which affect their lives, in accordance with Article 10 of the UN Convention on Rights of the

Child.

The Assembly Government has put in place a range of mechanisms to help achieve this aspiration. Details can be found in the Cabinet Paper of 10th January 2005, accessed via the website below.
<http://www.wales.gov.uk/organicabinet/content/Cabmeetings/index.htm>

Developments in 2005

Arrangements are under development to ensure that the importance of involving children and young people at early stages of policy development is emphasised to all relevant policy-making areas within the Assembly Government.

Part of the Welsh Assembly Government's participation project also involves providing training to young people to take part in participation activity. The project, which is supported by ESF funding, gives young people opportunities to train in one or more of six themes which are: policy development, consultation, producing young person friendly documents, procurement, audit and recruitment. The aim of the project is to give young people the skills and experience to participate in a meaningful and relevant way in Assembly work and also in local participation activities. The project also involves raising awareness with organisations throughout Wales about the benefits of involving children and young people. One of the main objectives of the project is to involve children and young people from hard to reach groups. This has been done through working closely with young people's networks and organisations in Wales whilst also extending information on the project to groups and individual young people who do not normally get involved.

Work planned for 2006 includes support for implementation of schools councils across Wales and the introduction of a more strategic approach designed to improve coordination across participative opportunities for children and young people at local level.

Links between children and young people's participation and active citizenship

The Assembly Government's aim is to ensure that opportunities for all children and young people in Wales to participate and have their voices heard are maximised in as many aspects of their lives as is possible. Effective participation has benefits in many ways; for example it can:

- improve services and make them more relevant to young people's needs
- lead to improved attendance at school, reduced truancy, and better learning outcomes
- reduce antisocial behaviour and lead to greater uptake of volunteering opportunities and more vibrant communities
- improve children and young people's skills, confidence and self-esteem
- reduce numbers of young people who are not in education training and employment and lead to improved economic activity
- encourage children and young people to access their other rights as citizens, including

- participation in the democratic process
- enhanced social capital in communities across Wales

School Councils

Background

The Welsh Assembly Government regards pupils as the most important stakeholders in education. Their future is determined to a very great extent by what goes on in schools. In the school of the future pupils must have a voice on issues that affect them. The Learning Country, the Assembly Government's strategic plan for education in Wales, gave a commitment to establishing statutory school councils in all maintained primary schools (except for infant and nursery schools) and secondary schools to build pupil confidence, give pupils a voice and to facilitate consultation between staff, the governing body and pupils, on issues involving pupils in the day to day running of the school and to make representations on these to the head teacher and the governing body.

School councils form part of the Assembly Government's wider participation agenda for children and young people, enabling them to participate in decisions that affect them and develop effective citizenship.

The Regulations

The Assembly made regulations which came into effect on 31 December 2005 requiring governing bodies to establish school councils in all maintained schools in Wales (apart from nursery and infant schools) and to run them in accordance with the regulatory framework prescribed.

The regulations provide that:

- governing bodies of all maintained schools (apart from nursery and infants schools) are required to establish school councils;
- school councils meeting the requirements of the Regulations are to be in place and hold their first meeting no later than 1 November 2006;
- school councils are to meet at least six times a year at regular intervals as far as is practicable (one meeting per half term is envisaged);
- members of school councils are to be drawn from the registered pupils of the school, with a further provision for a single school council to be established to cover all schools on a single site if the governing bodies so wishes;
- all pupils in the school from year 3 upwards (that is apart from infant pupils in primary or special schools) are to select members for the school council;
- all year groups (apart from infant year groups in primary schools) are to be represented on school councils;
- the requirements relating to year group representation do not apply to special schools;

- pupils in Special Needs Resource Bases in mainstream maintained schools are to have their own representatives on school councils;
- appointment to the school council is to be by election in a secret ballot except in relation to special schools and where arrangements are made for all registered pupils of a maintained school to be members of the school council;
- school councils in secondary schools are to be able to nominate 2 of their members from years 10-13 inclusive to be Associate Pupil Governors on the school governing body; with the school governing body being required to accept such nominations. Such Associate Pupil Governors would not have voting rights and are excluded from all consideration of matters relating to staff appointments, pay, and staff and pupil discipline;
- feedback from each school council meeting is to be provided to all pupils and to the head teacher and governing body; the head teacher and governing body being required to consider the feedback;
- school councils meetings are to have adult supervision by at least one member of the school staff, this could be a member of the teaching or non-teaching staff.

These matters are included in regulations so as to ensure that all schools councils are constituted in the same way, they provide pupils with the same rights and representation and to ensure that schools councils have proper recognition by the school staff and governing body and that the views of pupils are considered by the head teacher and governing body and there is feedback to the school council.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that school councils do provide pupils with a voice on school matters and properly involve them in decisions in school that affect them. In this respect the regulation requirement for governing bodies to accept 2 pupils from the school council from years 10 onwards as non-governor members is an important provision.

The requirement for governing bodies of schools in Wales to establish school councils is a distinctive Welsh policy. These regulations introduce this requirement. There is no equivalent requirement for schools in England.

Guidance

The Assembly Government will be issuing guidance to schools to help governing bodies and school staff establish and ensure school councils are run in accordance with the regulations. The guidance will also cover other issues not provided for in regulations including:

- the size of school councils;
- schools with up to 30 pupils on roll should be permitted to establish school councils with all pupils as members if they wish;
- the duration and timing of school council meetings;
- arrangements for election of members and nomination of Associate Pupil Governors;
- membership of schools councils should be mixed in gender in co-educational schools, to broadly

- reflect the proportions of boys and girls in the school, except in relation to special schools;
- agenda setting;
 - school councils should not consider or discuss issues relating to individual pupils and staff members;
 - the operation of a school council, including the role of adults, the council's relationship with the head teacher and governing body and general good practice for adult involvement;
 - ways of ensuring all pupils are engaged with their school council, including election of council members, feedback from council meetings, and publicising the work of the council;
 - good practice examples drawn from existing, functioning school councils.

The guidance will also emphasise that although there is no statutory requirement for school councils to be established in maintained infant and nursery schools, these schools are encouraged to put in place arrangements appropriate to the age of the children to encourage discussion of and contribution to school matters which affect them.

It is anticipated that the guidance will be issued in Spring 2006.