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# Education and Young People - Policy Briefing

## Introduction – Education

The Welsh Assembly Government's approach to education policy has been highlighted as a clear example of the 'clear red water' that has emerged between English and Welsh policy. For example, the rhetoric in Wales has stressed the key role of education within the community and the importance of principles such as social justice, universalism, trust of providers, and equality of outcomes. This is typically contrasted with the 'consumerist' approach adopted within England which has provided a key role for assessment and the publication of schools data. For example, the Welsh Assembly Government abandoned league tables for primary and secondary schools and the Daugherty Report, published in 2003, was commissioned by WAG to undertake a review of the country's assessment procedures – leading to Key Stage Two and Three tests becoming optional.

## 1. Governance Structures

Education represents one of the National Assembly for Wales' largest areas of spending and responsibility, therefore the primary focus of policy development and delivery are the all-Wales and local levels.

### 1.1 *All Wales level*

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), within the Welsh Assembly Government, is primarily responsible for education and skills policy. DCELLS operates through four groups which are responsible for policy, planning, funding, and monitoring services:

- Children, Young People and School Effectiveness Group – learner support, schools management, educational effectiveness and children's and young people's strategy.
- Qualifications, Curriculum and Learning Improvement Group – the content of the school curriculum, assessment arrangements, practitioner development, the regulation of qualifications and support for Welsh-medium teaching.
- Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning Group – post-16 education and training, including HE, and skills development.
- Business Improvement and Resource Investment Group – corporate services, knowledge management, and the management and delivery of DCELLS funding to learners and providers.

In addition the department has four regional teams responsible for engaging with local stakeholders and providers and feeding local knowledge back into the Department and a Strategy Unit, focused on the strategic and policy development across DCELLS.

The delivery of education policy is also led by two key Assembly sponsored public bodies (ASPBs): the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW). The governance structures within Wales underwent significant changes in 2005 when the National Council for Educations and Training for Wales (ELWa) – which merged the functions of the former Training and Enterprise Councils in Wales with the Further Education Funding Council for Wales – was abolished and many of its key functions brought ‘in-house’ into DCELLS.

## **1.2** *Delivery partnerships and local level*

In addition to the national level ASPBs, the Welsh Assembly Government collaborates with a range of actors in delivering education policy, including Higher Education institutions – represented through Higher Education Wales, Further Education colleges and local authorities.

## **2. Key Policy Documents**

**2.1** *The Learning Country: a paving document - a comprehensive education and lifelong learning programme to 2010 in Wales* (WAG, 2001) was published in August 2001 and sets out the Welsh Assembly Government’s programme to transform education and lifelong learning in Wales. The plan stressed the key role of local communities in addressing local needs and includes proposals from early years to higher and further education.

**2.2** *Reaching Higher: Higher Education and the Learning Country - A strategy for the higher education sector in Wales* (WAG, 2002) published in May 2002, the strategy provides the Welsh Assembly Government’s commitment to developing a competitive, robust and sustainable higher education sector in Wales. It provides the overarching vision of a world class but inclusive higher education sector and the key steps that need to be taken in achieving this vision.

**2.3** *Learning Pathways Through Statutory Assessment: Key Stages 2 and 3: Final Report of the Daugherty Assessment Review Group* (2004) published in May 2004, the final report outlines the findings of the group’s review of National Curriculum assessments arrangements for Key Stages 2 and 3 in Wales.

**2.4** *Fair and Flexible Funding: a Welsh model to promote quality and access in higher education - Final Report of an Independent Study into the Devolution of the Student Support System and Tuition Fee Regime in Wales (The Rees Review)* (2005) – the Rees Review was set up in response to the devolution of elements of higher education funding and student support through the Higher Education Act 2004. The final report considers how to respond to these new powers and makes recommendations on the use of these powers to ensure an adequately funded sector for Wales and fair and flexible support for students.

**2.5** *The Learning Country: vision into action* (WAG, 2006) published in October 2006, the document represents the second stage in the *Learning Country* programme and highlights the increased education and training opportunities available in Wales from early years through to further education. The document outlines the Assembly Government's key objectives and action areas in delivering the *Learning Country* agenda.

**2.6** *Review of Higher Education in Wales – Phases 1 & 2* (2008 & 2009) the first phase report on student finance arrangements was published in October 2008 and the second phase report which provided a high-level and long term review of the "mission, purpose, role and funding for higher education in Wales" was published in April 2009.

**2.7** *For Our Future - The 21st Century Higher Education Strategy and Plan for Wales* (WAG, 2009) published in November 2009, the strategy replaces *Reaching Higher* and provides the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the *Review of Higher Education in Wales*.

In addition there are a range of key policies which provide the primary focus for these strategic documents, including Flying Start, Raising Achievement and Individual Standards in Education (RAISE), the Welsh Baccalaureate and Learning Pathways 14-19.

### **3. Key Data Sets**

**3.1** *Schools in Wales: General Statistics* (WAG, 2009) - annual volume presents information on the school sector in Wales drawn from a number of sources, mainly the Schools Census. Includes statistics for a range of areas, including primary and secondary education, teachers, special education etc...

**3.2** *Schools in Wales: Examination Performance* (WAG, 2008) – annual volume contains historic national statistics, statistics for individual local education authorities and some Wales and England comparisons.

**3.3** *Key Educational Statistics* (WAG, 2009) – general educational statistics provided on the Stats Wales website and summarised in leaflet form. Combines statistics on pre-school, primary and secondary education and further education.

**3.4** *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics* (WAG, 2007/08) - is the fifth in a series providing statistics about the post-16 learning sector in Wales.

**3.5** *Higher Education Statistics for the UK* (HESA, 2007/08) – annual statistics are produced by both the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The report provides wide variety of data but more detailed compendiums can be found on both the HEFCW and HESA websites.

Further statistical data can be found on the Learning & Skills Observatory Wales, General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW) and Welsh Assembly Government websites.

## **4. Emerging Themes and Questions**

A range of high profile themes related to education have emerged in Wales since devolution, including questions related to the impact of the ‘clear red water’ approach adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government relative to the position within England. However, perhaps the two clearest issues in recent years have been school closures and the role of the Welsh language. School closures are a pertinent issue in primary schools in both urban and rural areas of the country. For rural areas in particular the closure of primary schools can have great significance – the school marks the communities hub for parents, and the school’s building is often used for events beyond the prescribed educational ones for the young people. In terms of the Welsh language, the demand for Welsh language secondary schools across the whole of Wales has outstripped supply, perhaps most notably in the urban areas of Cardiff and the Valleys. In addition the consequences of the wider financial pressures that are likely to impact upon the Welsh Assembly Government after the 2010 General Election has raised question marks regarding the future of policy in Wales.

### **Introduction – Young People**

The cross-cutting policy agenda of children and young people is tied into the education policy area put forward by the Welsh Assembly Government but also encompasses policy areas such as social justice and health. In 2004 the Welsh Assembly Government formally adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which provides the basis for the Assembly Government’s policy-making for children and young people focused on seven core aims that all children and young people:

1. have a flying start in life;
2. have a comprehensive range of education and learning opportunities;
3. enjoy the best possible health and are free from abuse, victimisation and exploitation;
4. have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities;
5. are listened to, treated with respect, and have their race and cultural identity recognised;
6. have a safe home and a community which supports physical and emotional wellbeing;
7. are not disadvantaged by poverty.

### **1. Governance Structures**

#### **1.1 *International***

As noted in the introduction a key actor in setting the agenda within the children and young people policy field has been the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UK signed the Convention on 19 April 1990, ratified it on 16 December 1991 and it came into force in the UK on 15 January 1992. The Welsh Assembly Government and UK Government report periodically to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child setting out how they are fulfilling the conventions obligations.

## **1.2** *UK level*

Many of the policy levers related to children and young people remain at least partly at the UK level and therefore the Welsh Assembly Government is required at times to engage with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in Whitehall. For example, in responding to Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008, the UK Government and devolved administrations published a joint strategy *Getting it right: a 5-year plan* aimed at providing a coordinated response.

## **1.3** *All-Wales*

The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) within the Welsh Assembly Government is formally responsible for young people in Wales but due to the cross-cutting character of the policy area the Departments for Health and Social Services (DHSS) and Social Justice and Local Government (DSJLG) are also engaged. The Welsh Assembly Government's work on children and young people encompasses a wide range of areas, including parenting and childcare, education and work, child protection and care, child poverty etc...

The Children's Commissioner for Wales Act 2001 established the UK's first independent Children's Commissioner with a broad remit to 'to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children and young people in Wales' and 'to monitor progress by Government in implementing children and young people's human and civil rights.' The Commissioner fulfils a wide ranging role and publishes an annual report.

The Welsh Assembly Government also established the Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, Funky Dragon. The Assembly is a peer-led organisation that aims are to give 0 – 25 year olds the opportunity to get their voices heard on issues that affect them.

## **1.4** *Local level*

Under the Children Act 2004 local authorities are required to work with their partners to publish a Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). These plans provide a statement of collaborative arrangements to drive improved outcomes, describing their strategic priorities and the actions, partner responsibilities and resources that will be required to achieve them. The partnerships are made up of a wide range of actors including local councillors, local authority officials, the voluntary sector, the health sector, the police and schools

A wide range of voluntary bodies are responsible for the delivery of local and community-based initiatives, for example, Reach the Heights, targets young people aged 11 to 19, living in West Wales and the South Wales Valleys. The project, launched in March 2009, is designed to use workshops and work-related experience to give young people key skills for future education and employment. Children in Wales provide an umbrella body for voluntary, statutory and private sectors involved in this policy area. In addition there is a network of well known charities and voluntary groups engaged in this policy area, such as the NSPCC and Barnardos.

## 2. Key Policy Documents

The Welsh Assembly Government's policy agenda on children and young people encompasses a wide range of initiatives and publications. For example, the *Extending Entitlement* and *Children and Young People Strategy* updates published in the first two terms of the Assembly provide an outline of the basic entitlements for young people living in Wales and the range of actions put forward by the Welsh Assembly Government.

**2.1** *Children and Young People: Rights to Action* (WAG, 2004) published in January 2004, the document provides an overview of the policy and provision of services for children and young people in Wales. It sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's seven core aims and the process of delivering and evaluating progress towards these aims.

**2.2** *A Fair Future for Our Children* (WAG, 2005) published in February 2005, sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020, compared with 1997 figures.

**2.3** *Childcare Strategy for Wales: Childcare is for Children* (WAG, 2005) published in November 2004, in response to the Childcare Working Group's report on implementing the Childcare Action Plan. The strategy sets out the Assembly Government's response to the recommendations by the group and the challenge of ensuring every child has a 'flying start' to life.

**2.4** *The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity* (WAG, 2005) launched by the Welsh Assembly Government in September 2005, the framework sets out the quality of services that children, young people and their families have a right to expect and receive in Wales.

**2.5** *Eradicating Child Poverty in Wales - Measuring Success* (WAG, 2006) published in September 2006, the document outlines the key milestones and targets adopted by the Welsh Assembly Government in measuring progress towards eradicating child poverty by 2020. Targets cover four main areas: income and work; education; health; and housing.

**2.6** *Rights in Action: Implementing Children and Young People's Rights in Wales* (WAG, 2007) published in March 2007, the report provides an overview of how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been implemented in Wales since 2002.

**2.7** *National Youth Service Strategy for Wales* (WAG, 2007) published in March 2007, the strategy draws on the 'Towards a Youth Service Strategy for Wales' consultation and identifies a range of actions to take forward.

**2.8** *Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales* (WAG, 2009) published in April 2009, the document sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's strategic approach to reducing the number of young people aged 16-18 not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Wales.

### **3. Key Data Sets**

**3.1** *Eradicating Child Poverty: Milestones and Targets Update* (WAG, 2009) Statistical Bulletin on Child Poverty in Wales provides statistics on indicators monitoring progress against the Welsh Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy. It includes national level data for the period up to early November 2008

**3.2** *Child Poverty Online Report* (WAG, 2009) last published in March 2009 - a new edition is due in April 2010 – provides more detailed analysis of the statistics on indicators that monitor progress against the Welsh Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy, outlining their progress against 2010 Milestones and 2020 Targets.

**3.3** *Children and young people's well-being monitor* (WAG, 2008) published in November 2008, the monitor takes as a starting point the seven core themes of the Welsh Assembly Government's children and young people strategy and pulls together statistics and research from a range of different sources, reporting on a variety of well-being indicators.

**3.4** *Consultation on the proposed approach indicators for a Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation: Child Index* (WAG, 2008) Consultation carried out by the Welsh Assembly Government around the proposed development of a 'Child Index' as part of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

### **4. Emerging Themes and Questions**

Child Poverty has been highlighted by the Welsh Assembly Government as a key priority and in March 2009, a Children and Families (Wales) Measure was published which was aimed at improving the lives of vulnerable children and families in Wales and those disadvantaged by poverty. This document called for a new Child Poverty Strategy to be published, and re-emphasised the call for child poverty to be eradicated by 2020.

In common with the rest of the UK, a key challenge for the Welsh Assembly Government has been responding to the seemingly intractable problem of young people defined as 'not in education, employment or training' (NEETs). Wales has the highest percentage of NEETs in the UK and the Welsh Assembly Government has responded by launching a range of funding initiatives, including Pre-Vent, funded by the Convergence European Social Fund. In addition Wales experiences similar social and health related issues as the rest of the UK, for example, antisocial behaviour and binge drinking.