

Education: Early years learning and development

Introduction

This topic brief provides background information on the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) approach to early years learning and development which is founded on the Flying Start programme for the 0-3 age group and the Foundation Phase for 3-7 year olds.

Flying start

The aim of Flying Start is to provide high quality services for children aged between 0 and 3 in the most disadvantaged communities, including extra health visiting, free, high quality childcare for two-year-olds, basic skills programmes and parenting courses. £15m is being provided to local authorities in 2006-07 and £31m in 2007-08. Consultationⁱ on the initiative was undertaken between November 2005 and February 2006. The responsesⁱⁱ identified several issues. There was general support for the programme although there were concerns over the use of free school meals as an indicator for allocation of funding; workforce issues; and the impact on special, Welsh medium, faith and rural schools.

In a Cabinet Statementⁱⁱⁱ of 14 July 2006, the Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills said that following consultation with the Welsh Local Government Association, she had decided on a different approach to the distribution of the grant. Local partnerships will have discretion to choose school catchment areas for the delivery of the programme and there will be an overall cap on the number of children targeted in each local authority area. Each local authority's Children and Young People's partnership will need to justify its choice of areas to receive funding by reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, pupil entitlement to free school meals and the relationship with Community First wards. The funding will be allocated on the same formula as the Cymorth grant which is largely based on the take-up of benefits. It is intended that Flying Start should remain a specific ring-fenced grant to local authorities until at least April 2011.

Foundation phase

The Foundation Phase is based on the principle that early years provision should offer a sound foundation for future learning and achievement through a developmentally appropriate curriculum, which is in harmony with the child's particular needs and interests. The Foundation Phase advocates children learning through first hand experiential activities and play and aims to place a child's personal and social development and well-being at the heart of the curriculum. The Foundation Phase is being introduced through a rolling programme. The Pilot, which began in September 2004 in 41 schools and settings, will continue until September 2008 when the statutory rollout begins. It includes settings in schools and in voluntary and private nurseries, playgroups and childminders. The intention is that from the start of the 2010/11 school year all 3 to 7-year-olds will have access to the Foundation Phase.

The Foundation Phase proposes a continuum of learning for children from the ages of 3 to 7. The new curriculum is based on the current *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning before Compulsory School Age*^{iv}, and links in with the Programmes of Study and focus statements currently in the National Curriculum for Key Stage 1. It contains seven areas of learning (AOL), which are:

- personal and social development and well-being;
- language, literacy and communication;
- mathematical development;
- bilingualism and multicultural understanding;
- knowledge and understanding of the world;
- physical development;
- creative development.

Childcare strategy

The Welsh Assembly Government formed the child care working group in 2004, chaired by the then Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Transport, Brian Gibbons. This group provided a substantial report on the WAG's 2002 childcare action plan. In response, the WAG published a new childcare strategy, *The Childcare Strategy for*

Wales: *Childcare is for Children*^v. This responded to the 77 recommendations the working group report made, and sets out the WAG's future approach to childcare.

Additional childcare support

In 2004 the Welsh Assembly Government successfully bid for European structural funds (ESF), under Objectives 1 and 3, for the purpose of increasing the contribution of ESF to childcare provision in Wales. The bid secured £10,079,420 under Objective 1, and £2,507,680 under Objective 3,^{vi} over three years. This funding is being matched from Cymorth allocations to local authorities. This funding has been used to establish the Genesis Wales project.

The Genesis Wales project has been designed to provide a comprehensive package of advice, support and childcare for individuals (predominantly women) wishing to access work, training, and learning opportunities. It has the high level goal of helping improve the economic activity of people in Wales.

The targets set for the project are:

- 13,000 Beneficiaries
- 8,500 Additional Childcare places created
- Progress towards National Training and Education targets
- 90% Women participation

Further information is available from www.genesiswales.com and from individual local authority children and young people's partnerships, which are responsible for the delivery of this project.

The Genesis Wales project began in 2005 and is due to conclude in 2008.

The Childcare Wales Bill 2007

The *Childcare Provision (Wales) Bill*, a Private Member's Bill was introduced to the House of Commons by Chris Bryant MP, and received its first reading on 18 April 2007^{vii}. It will receive its second reading on 19 October 2007 and seeks to make further provision in relation to child care facilities in Wales. Chris Bryant MP indicated his support for the Welsh Labour Party's Assembly manifesto pledge to introduce 'mobile mamas'^{viii} during his introduction of the Bill.

Legacy issues

The Education, Lifelong Learning, and Skills Committee recommended to the successor committee that will have responsibility for scrutinising early years education in the next Assembly^{ix}. The recommendation is to monitor 'the implementation of the roll-out of Flying Start and the Foundation Phase, provision for 3 to 7 year olds'.

Useful Links

- Welsh Assembly Government Early Years information - http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/policy_strategy_and_planning/early-wales/?lang=en
- Children in Wales: <http://www.childreninwales.org.uk/index.html>

Further information

For further information on any aspect of Education in Wales, please contact Anne Thomas, Members' Research Service (Anne.Thomas@wales.gsi.Gov.UK), 029 2089 8966

ⁱ Welsh Assembly Government consultation document, *Flying Start*, 28 November 2005

ⁱⁱ Children In Wales, *Flying Start, Report of the Analysis of the Consultation Responses*, March 2006

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Assembly Government, Jane Davidson, Minister for Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills, *Flying Start and RAISE*, Cabinet Written Statement, 14 July 2006

^{iv} ACCAC, *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning Before Compulsory School Age*, 2000

^v Welsh Assembly Government Information Document (047-05), *The Childcare Strategy for Wales: Childcare is for Children*, November 2005

^{vi} Data obtained from the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) www.wefo.wales.gov.uk

^{vii} [HC Deb 18 April 2007 c312](#)

^{viii} Welsh Labour Party, *Building a Better Wales: Welsh Labour Election Manifesto 2007*, April 2007 p.2

^{ix} National Assembly for Wales, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Committee Paper (ELLS(2) 05-07 Paper 8), *Committee's Legacy Paper*, 21 March 2007