



CADWYN



ALL WALES CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE *for* GOVERNOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

welcome

First National Conference For School Governors In Wales Welcomes Jane Davidson, AM.

Our first annual conference took place at the Metropole Hotel, Llandrindod Wells on Friday 12 and Saturday 13 October, and proved a great success. The main speaker, Jane Davidson AM, National Assembly Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, opened with an outstanding speech in which she outlined her aims for making Wales a truly "Learning Country", and the part that governors could play in making this vision become reality. The confidence and candour with which she then answered questions from the floor was testimony to her knowledge and commitment.



Photograph: Brecon and Radnor Express

Rhodri Fowler, the former Director of the All Wales Centre of Excellence for Governor Training and Research, then gave an overview of current governor training strategies. This was followed by workshops in which delegates were divided into five groups to discuss the strategic role of school governors, self-evaluation, school inspections, leadership, and governors and public scrutiny.

The first day ended with dinner, after which Professor Gareth Elwyn Jones of the University of Wales Swansea, made a highly amusing but thought-provoking speech.

The guest speaker on Saturday morning was Peter Earley, Reader in Education Management at the University of London Institute of Education, who spoke at length on the governors' role in raising achievement. As well as being an academic, Peter is also a school governor, so his suggestions were both research-based and the result of first-hand experience.

The Conference closed with an 'Any Questions' forum chaired by Professor Maurice Whitehead, Head of the Department of Education at the University of Wales Swansea. The panel, consisting of Peter Earley, Dewi Jones (Director of Education, Rhondda Cynon Taff), Professor Gareth Elwyn Jones (school governor), and Steve Gullick (recently retired comprehensive school headteacher) answered a number of questions put to them from the floor.

In all, over 90 delegates were present, and it was particularly encouraging that every unitary authority in Wales was represented by at least one governor. Our thanks are due to all who attended, and particularly to those who spoke or acted as facilitators or scribes in the workshops.

A full conference report is being produced. This will be sent to all delegates, LEAs and governors associations. Copies will be available from the Centre on request.

Personnel

There has been a change in personnel at the Centre with the retirement in July of the Director, Rhodri Fowler. As the first Director, Rhodri worked with great enthusiasm and the success which the Centre has enjoyed owes much to his vision and skill. We express our thanks to Rhodri for all his efforts. They are much appreciated.

The new Director is Steve Gullick, who joined us in September. Steve is a recently retired comprehensive school headteacher. He taught for over twenty years in Birmingham before taking up a headship in Wales in 1994. He has also served as a teacher governor in two Midlands schools.



From The Project Director



Since the Spring 2001 edition of **Cadwyn**, there has been much activity at the Centre. The first national conference for school governors in Wales proved a great success and set quite a standard for future years. The suggestions for topics for next year's conference have been very interesting, and we've already begun thinking about the programme.

We have also been involved in a number of visits to address governor associations, and as the new director I've been very pleased to have received invitations to speak to five associations. It seems that, in addition to wanting to know more about the Centre, governors are interested in my views as a recently retired Head on the role of governors and how best they can contribute to their school's work. If any other group (either association or individual school governing body) would like me to address them, don't hesitate to contact me.

Steve Gullick

Acting Strategically

To what extent is your governing body carrying out its functions "... with the aim of taking a mainly strategic role in the running of a school"?

Recent research undertaken by the Centre shows that the governor training programmes run by the local education authorities in Wales are providing more opportunities to enable school governors to become more effective in undertaking their strategic role. In support of their work, we have prepared an occasional paper entitled School Governors and their Strategic Role which looks at what is meant by governors' strategic role, the strategic processes to be followed, and the importance of creating a strategic culture.

Our aim with this paper is to encourage governors to work alongside the Head and school senior management team in considering strategic management issues that contribute towards the overall goals of the school. This is particularly important in relation to the School Development Plan, given its strategic relevance, as well as the post-inspection Action Plan and, of course, the development of policies.

This document has been distributed to LEAs and governors' associations: further copies can be obtained from the Centre.

Research News

The Centre is about to publish an occasional paper entitled Headteachers and Governing Body Training. If you would like a copy, please contact us at the Centre.

We are now considering further areas for research. It appears from the feedback we have received that governors are particularly interested in Headteacher/Chair relations, Governor/teaching staff relations, and governing body self-evaluation, so in the New Year we will start preparing our research into those areas.

Llywodraethwyr Cymru

Governors Wales

Governors' Helpline

Telephone: 0845 602 0100

is the new helpline for governors of schools in Wales.

Operated by Governors Wales the helpline will provide advice on a range of issues to governors in all parts of Wales.



Individual Governing Body Training

Over the past year or so, individual governing body training has become more popular. Gill Waring, Governor Training Officer, writes of experience of this area at the Wrexham Directorate of Education and Leisure Services.

The Governor Services Department in Wrexham has been offering individual governing body training for the last three years. One of our key principles for achieving quality learning for children and young people in Wrexham has been to identify the critical importance of excellent leadership in our schools. Governor training forms an essential part of this process.

Like most Authorities, we recognised that we have schools on the peripheries and travelling to training events at central venues can be problematic for some governors.

Although individual governing bodies have been happy to receive pre- and post-inspection advice in the past, the idea of governing body self-review, where areas of strength/weakness and individual training needs are identified, is a new concept. The roles of governors are far-reaching in that they are now strategic managers who act as 'critical friends' to the headteacher and they must, by law, aim to promote high standards of educational achievement at the school. At first sight,

these responsibilities can seem daunting, but governors are able to develop their skills of governance through training and networking with more experienced colleagues.



As they develop their skills, governors become more focused and easily identify their own individual training needs and those of the full governing body. For this reason, as Wrexham governors become more confident, they are requesting individual governing body training to develop skills in ICT, committee structure, relationships with headteachers, employment and staffing issues, managing the budget and special educational needs. This gives them the opportunity to discuss specific issues relating to their own circumstances and to 'fine tune' their skills. It also doesn't seem quite so daunting to become involved in discussion or to ask questions in a small, familiar group.

The Directorate of Education and Leisure Services (Governor Services Department) welcomes this new interest from individual governing bodies and recognises that it is a very important development, adding value to the already extensive training programme.

Letter to the Editor: From: Mr C L Hughes, Denbigh

Dear Sir

I am a parent governor at Denbigh High School, and secretary of Denbighshire Governors Association.

Our LEA and the Education Committee, or Scrutiny Panel as it has now become, has had co-opted members representing parents, governors, teachers, and the churches for many years. The Chairman of the Education Committee has always valued and sought the contribution and expert advice of these stakeholders.

All my colleagues in the Denbighshire education community have been positive and enthusiastic about the new "Elected Parent Governor Representatives" and

I welcome the work being done in Wales to hold a conference for these parents. We need to set up channels of communication for networking, mutual support, mentoring, and sharing of best practice, because this being new, together with the new committee structure, it may well be a lonely and difficult role to fit into.

I would welcome contact from other representatives via **Janet Jones (Governors Wales),**

**2 Llandaff Drive, Prestatyn, Denbighshire LL19 8AS
Email: janetjones40@hotmail.com**

Your Opinions Count

We welcome your comments, opinions and suggestions, and should be glad to publish them in future editions of this Newsletter. Please send them to:

All Wales Centre of Excellence for Governor Training and Research
Department of Education • University of Wales Swansea • Hendrefoelan • SWANSEA • SA2 7NB



Conversations

In this and future issues of *Cadwyn*, we will be reporting conversations between the Director, Steve Gullick, and representatives of different sections of the education community on various aspects of school governance. The first conversation is with **Professor Gareth Elwyn Jones** on the general role of governors. Gareth has been a governor of an 11-16 mixed comprehensive of over 1,000 pupils since 1983.

SG Why did you become a school governor, Gareth?

GEJ The main reason was that my children attended the school. Also, my job involved visiting quite a lot of schools, so being a governor gave me the opportunity to see a school from a new perspective.

SG What do you consider to be your role as a governor?

GEJ Most of my role is laid out in legislation so in many ways my "job description", as it were, is set out for me. Equally important, though, is not just the duties a governor has to carry out but how he or she fulfils them.

SG What do you mean by that?

GEJ Well, I think it's essential that governors carry out their duties in as supportive a way as possible – appreciative of the work of the senior management team and staff, extolling the achievements of the pupils; that sort of thing. Of course, I'm fortunate as I'm a governor of a well-run school where pupils achieve. It might be different for governors of a school experiencing difficulties, though even then I believe a thoughtful, sensitive approach would yield the best results.

SG You have been a governor for a long time. Has the role of governors changed over the years?

GEJ Oh, enormously! In the early 1980s, governors had very few decision-making powers and, in reality, governing bodies in those days were little more than ceremonial pressure groups for their school. We'd attend prize giving ceremonies and, if the school needed something like repairs or building work done, we'd liaise with the LEA to

hurry things along. And that was about it. We certainly weren't involved in appointments or finance and so on in the way that governing bodies are now. The meetings were also a lot shorter in the early '80s!

SG What difficulties do you find in carrying out governor duties?

GEJ The first one has to be time. There have been so many changes in education that it's a real effort to keep up-to-date with what is happening and how it affects schools.

The second difficulty is a feeling that we are sometimes making decisions "in the dark". Governing bodies are usually unaware of what goes on in other schools, so there aren't really any practical comparisons to help you make decisions on such things as salaries, what percentage of the budget to spend on refurbishment or capitation etc.

Thirdly, it's very difficult when you have to accept a change in education to which you are opposed. That's why I'm glad there are not going to be any specialist schools in Wales. I could imagine arguments, rows and bad feeling in a governing body if some governors supported the move to specialist school status while others fundamentally opposed it – and that sort of atmosphere can't be good for a school.

SG O.K., you've described the difficulties, Gareth, so what one thing would you introduce or change to make your role more effective?

GEJ That's a tough one! I don't want to seem complacent but I think governing bodies are reasonably effective as we are now. I suppose we'd all be more knowledgeable if we all (and I include myself) were better attenders at governor training events, but that can be difficult as most governors have full time jobs or have families to bring up.

Hmm ... yes, I've got it. The single change I'd make is for all governors to have a fortune-teller's abilities when it comes to staff interviews because, of all governor duties, selection of staff is by far the most important.

Website

The Centre's web site is now up and running at: www.swan.ac.uk/education/research/governor.htm

This gives general information regarding our activities. Our future plans are to include on the web site summaries of our occasional papers and our newsletter, but this facility is at present under development.

For further information on the Centre and its activities, or any comments you wish to make, please contact us – we should be very pleased to hear from you.

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