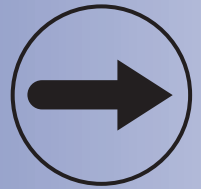


# The Attendance Task and Finish Group: Final Report and Provisional Action Plan

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Department for Training and Education



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

## **THE ATTENDANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP:**

### **FINAL REPORT**

<b>Audience:</b>	Local education authorities, governing bodies, schools, the education welfare service, parents and all other parties involved in encouraging children to attend school.
<b>Overview:</b>	The document represents the findings and recommendations of an expert group of practitioners involved in tackling truancy and its effects. A provisional action plan to take forward the recommendations is attached at Annex 5.
<b>Action required:</b>	Further details will be provided to relevant parties on taking forward the action plan.
<b>Further information:</b>	<p>Please contact:</p> <p>Graham Davies Pupil Support Division National Assembly for Wales Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ <a href="mailto:Graham.davies@wales.gsi.gov.uk">Graham.davies@wales.gsi.gov.uk</a> 029 20826897</p>
<b>More copies:</b>	<p>Please contact:</p> <p>Rachel Pass Pupil Support Division National Assembly for Wales Cathays Park Cardiff CF10 3NQ <a href="mailto:Rachel.pass@wales.gsi.gov.uk">Rachel.pass@wales.gsi.gov.uk</a> 029 20823835</p>
<b>Related documents:</b>	National Assembly for Wales Circular 3/99: Pupil Support and Inclusion, September 1999



# **THE ATTENDANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP:**

## **FINAL REPORT**

### **SUMMARY**

The Attendance Task and Finish Group was brought together from June to September 2002 to take forward some of the issues discussed at the Wales-wide Tackling Disaffection Together Conference of October 2001. The Group was co-ordinated by the Welsh Assembly Government's (the Assembly) Pupil Support Division and was made up of representatives of the wide-ranging organisations involved in tackling truancy and its effects. The Membership is shown in Annex 1. This report expresses the thoughts of the Group and gives a series of recommendations for tackling the issues in Wales. In presenting the report, the Group acknowledge and congratulate the efforts which are currently being made to address the problems throughout Wales, both within schools and more widely. A provisional action plan is attached at Annex 5.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Short-term (by the end of 2002-03 academic year)**

- S1. Simplify the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on classifying absences and consider the use of targets and the reporting of progress against these.
- S2. Establish how many primary schools have readily available figures on attendance rates.
- S3. Undertake an audit and evaluation of LEAs' spending on attendance issues, particularly the destination of GEST funding and the pilot projects for tackling disaffection.
- S4. Undertake an audit of the methods of passing information between primary and secondary schools on individual pupils' attendance.
- S5. Undertake an audit of schools' and LEAs' attendance policies, how up-to-date these are and how well they link together.
- S6. Set-up a group to advise, on a regular basis, on strategy, best practice and to consider ongoing research.
- S7. Consider the approaches to be used in pursuing legal action on parent-condoned truancy cases.
- S8. Perform truancy sweeps on a regular basis in each LEA.

#### **Long-term**

- L1. Review and cost the extent of electronic registration throughout Wales, and develop a strategy for extending its use throughout Wales to a certain standard.
- L2. Review the funding, role, responsibilities and training /accreditation system of the educational welfare service in Wales.

- L3. Clarify and simplify the funding streams used to tackle truancy.
- L4. Establish systems to share good and innovative practice on tackling truancy.
- L5. Carry out a pilot on reducing absences in two schools to assess the extent to which this is possible and to help evaluate how funding should be focused.
- L6. Increase the level of intervention at primary school level and in particular put systems in place to ensure that individual pupils' attendance figures are shared between primary and secondary schools.
- L7. Develop a framework for multi-agency working, including the necessary training elements.
- L8. Review the process of taking attendance cases through magistrates' courts, including the link between magistrates' clerks and the educational welfare service and the timetable for hearing attendance cases

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## SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

### A Introduction

The **Terms of Reference** of the Group were defined as:

To develop actions relating to the recommendations produced at the 'Tackling Disaffection Together' conference.

Specifically:

- To explore the reasons for truancy and advise on current best practice on how it may be tackled and methods by which information may be shared.
- To consider the division of responsibility amongst all parties involved in tackling truancy and its consequences.
- To advise on the most cost-efficient methods of tackling truancy.
- To advise on clearer guidelines for schools on how to record and report absence.

### B The situation

Attendance levels in the UK are generally lower than in similar countries. It is difficult to ascertain the exact reasons due to the complexity of the problem but is likely to be due to both cultural and practical reasons.

**Table 1: Percentage of sessions missed in secondary schools**

	1995-1996		2000-2001	
	Total	Unauthorised	Total	Unauthorised
Wales	11.0	1.6	10.4	1.6
England*	9.4	1.0	9.1	1.1
Scotland	12.3	1.4	11.4	1.5
N Ireland	7.5	n/a	7.8	n/a

\*English figures are for LEA maintained schools only

Given the link between attendance rates and levels of deprivation it is to be expected that both Wales and Scotland would have higher rates than England. However, Wales might not be expected to be so much lower than Scotland on this basis. The rates for Northern Ireland are much lower than the other countries, most likely due to its higher proportion of denominational schools which generally have lower truancy levels.



Given the overall rate of absence, the proportion which are unauthorised in Wales appears higher in Wales compared to both Scotland and England. This warrants further investigation but may, in part, represent different recording practices.

In recent years, absence levels in the UK have been fairly static, with a slight reduction since 1995-96, with the exception of Northern Ireland. Early figures for England for 2001-02 show a decrease in the total level of absences of a few tenths of a percentage point, this being due to a decrease in authorised absences with levels of unauthorised absence remaining largely unchanged. Figures for Wales for 2001-02 are due to be released on October 23<sup>rd</sup>.

There is considerable variation within Wales, with absence rates ranging from 8.4% to 12.0% (Annex 2, Table 1). In general, authorities with a higher level of deprivation have higher absence rates. This can be shown further by the fact that absence rates correlate closely with the rates of pupils entitled to receive free school meals (Annex 2, Table 2).

The picture by type of school is as expected, with special schools having the highest rates of absence and independents having much lower rates than both special and mainstream secondary schools.

By gender, girls have a slightly higher rate for all absences but boys have a higher rate of unauthorised absence (1.9% cf 1.6%).

Information is not collected on primary schools on a regular basis however the report of HMCI for 99-00 gave figures of 5% of schools attendance rates being unsatisfactory with none being poor. This compared with figures of 32% unsatisfactory and 8% poor for secondary schools.

## **C Reasons for truancy**

The following excerpts from *Ken Reid: Truancy and Schools* describe some of the possible reasons for truancy and the pupils at risk:

*'There is no single cause of truancy. If there was, finding a solution would be easy. Every truant is unique. So is every school and every family unit. The decision to start truanting is an extremely significant one. Usually pupils decide to start 'mitching' because they are:*

- a. avoiding a potentially difficult situation (e.g. bullying);*
- b. sending out a signal that they need help or are, in some way other way, at risk;*
- c. overwhelmed by their home or social circumstances;*
- d. psychologically distressed;*
- e. at a point of no return, perhaps at the end of their tether;*
- f. seriously disenchanted with school, a teacher or fellow pupils;*
- g. struggling with their schoolwork;*
- h. unwell;*
- i. under peer pressure to miss school.*

*'The following, far from exhaustive list identifies those pupils who may potentially be poor attenders. Many of the categories clearly overlap and are interconnected. It is not inferred that such pupils are automatically prone to poor attendance, nor does the list seek to stigmatise such pupils in any way. But such a checklist can be a useful tool for schools in helping to identify at an early stage those pupils who might be beginning to experience difficulties. They include pupils:*

- whose parents have recently separated;*
- who have recently moved to a new district;*
- who join a school midway through the school year;*
- who have recently missed a lot of school time through illness;*
- whose siblings (and/or parents) have been poor school attenders;*
- whose performance/attainment level in school tends to be poor;*
- who tend to be teased or bullied;*
- who have difficulty with the curriculum yet do not have a statement of SEN;*
- who are persistently disruptive;*
- who have previously been excluded;*
- whose parents are experiencing severe financial hardship (and cannot afford bus fare, uniform, etc.);*
- under pressure from examinations;*
- who are experiencing difficulty forming relationships with their peers and/or are unpopular in school;*
- who are shy or highly introverted;*
- who fail to undertake homework on a regular basis;*
- who arrive at school (and/or lessons) late without good reason;*
- who get into trouble a lot outside school.'*

Even though the causes of truancy are well known, perhaps what is less known is the extent to which each of these explains absence levels, although the extent of overlap of the various causes would make this a difficult task. Further research could be undertaken to ascertain this but this needs to be balanced against the need to focus resources on tackling truancy directly.

The ever-increasing problems in society, particularly those of substance misuse and family breakdown mean that tackling truancy will become more difficult. In fact, some believe that keeping attendance levels at their current rates will be a challenge, let alone attaining any significant rise.

## **D Limitations of statistics**

In considering the current situation in Wales the limitations of the statistics need to be recognised. The essential problems are that:

- figures are collected at registration time so don't measure those cases of absence after this time or for specific lessons.
- there is substantial anecdotal evidence that the reporting of absence is inconsistent from school to school and possibly from teacher to teacher.
- there is a built-in perverse incentive to keep attendance levels as high as possible and particularly to classify absences as authorised.
- the system of classification used for recording absences is relatively complex.
- the Assembly does not currently collect information from primary schools

Official figures are likely to underestimate the actual rate of absence as the practice of leaving school after registration is common. A system of registering at each lesson would help in tracking true attendance levels and identifying the onset of truancy in individual pupils. The attendance of pupils at colleges of further education would have to be considered as an element of this, particularly if provision through this means is extended in order to increase the provision for pupils who are following an alternative curriculum, possibly due to exclusion from mainstream schools.

Electronic registration packages would be a powerful tool in operating systems of registering at each class but there are a variety of packages available and an audit of these and an assessment of their effectiveness would help schools and LEAs to decide their approach.

Simplifying the classification system would lessen the burden on teachers and support staff to a certain extent. A simpler system is more likely to be recorded in a consistent manner across Wales which will strengthen comparisons between schools and authorities. Adopting a standard approach throughout Wales would also be helpful in this regard.

The guidance (Circular 3/99) would need amending to change the ways of recording absences. This would be best done in a small sub-group before wider consultation.

The absence of centrally available information from primary schools may be a drawback in terms of looking further into early signs of future absence. As it is known that at least some local education authorities (LEAs) in Wales collect this information on a regular basis from their primary schools, it would be worth investigating the feasibility of a Wales-wide data collection. Any benefits of a new data collection would need to be balanced against the extra burden on schools to collect information and the smaller scale of the problem in primary schools.

## **Recommendations:**

**S1. Simplify the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on classifying absences and consider the use of targets and the reporting of progress against these.**

**S2. Establish how many primary schools have readily available figures on attendance rates.**

**L1. Review and cost the extent of electronic registration throughout Wales, and develop a strategy for extending its use throughout Wales to a certain standard.**

## **E Targets**

In Wales, targets only exist for secondary schools whereas, in England, DfES sets separate targets for primary and secondary schools of 95 and 92% respectively for 2004. The Welsh targets set out in The Learning Country are:

- 92% for 2004
- 93% by 2007
- 95% by 2010

Given that even the areas in Wales with the highest attendance rates are below 92%, it will clearly be particularly challenging to achieve these levels nationally by 2004. This is especially true considering that attendance rates have been fairly static over the last 5 or 6 years.

Previous legislation allowed the Assembly to set targets only on unauthorised rather than total absences. However, the new Education Act, which received Royal Assent in July 2002, allows targets on overall absence to be actively pursued if needed, and would allow authorities to include these in Education Strategic Plans. It is recommended that the group looking at the review of the classification of absences should also consider the use of targets. It is important that any targets developed would not offer perverse incentives and would encourage the honest reporting of attendance levels.

The reporting of progress against targets to governing bodies and to the Assembly is an essential aspect of the process. The Education Strategic Plans are the main vehicle by which LEAs report plans and progress to the Assembly and the Supplementary Education Strategic Plans for 2003-04 represent an opportunity for LEAs to expand further on how they intend to tackle attendance issues, particularly in the light of recommendations in this report. The reporting of information to governing bodies could be covered by the same group considering the classification of absences and targets.

## **F Funding and current initiatives**

Due to the difficulty in providing a precise definition, coupled with the cross-cutting nature of the problem, it is not possible to say exactly how much is being spent on tackling disaffection in general, least of all specifically on tackling truancy. However the major initiatives and sources of funding for

2002-03 are shown in Annex 3. The totals for the whole area of tackling disaffection are shown rather than specific amounts spent on truancy or disaffection. It is clearly problematic to track the impacts of specific policies in isolation.

The Welsh Assembly Government approach to funding measures to tackle disaffection and truancy in Wales has not been that of distributing specific grants directly to a limited number of authorities and schools through initiatives such as Excellence in Cities and Connexions in England. Instead it has adopted a more community-based approach of distributing a far higher proportion of funding to Unitary Authorities through the local government settlement. This gives greater flexibility to authorities to target spending according to local priorities.

Due to the differences in approach it is difficult to directly compare levels of expenditure specifically on disaffection and truancy. In terms of total spending on education, however, after excluding London which automatically has higher levels of funding due to London-weighting of teachers' pay, the levels of funding per pupil in England and Wales are very similar. The major difference in approach is that a far higher proportion of funding in England is retained centrally and distributed in the form of specific grants.

Policy agreements in Wales represent a means of providing incentives to local authorities to tackle attendance issues as part of a general package of local authority performance measures. Local authorities who are seen to have made sufficient progress on their policy agreements will receive their proportion of the total of 30 million pounds available for 2003-04

It is also important to demonstrate that the main source of funding, Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST), which is distributed to the LEA, finds its way to the schools themselves. More transparency would make it easier to show how LEAs are using the GEST funding.

The number of funding streams available for tackling the area of disaffection often causes difficulties in keeping track of the various elements. Further clarification and simplification of these is needed.

Particular concerns exist over the resource levels for the educational welfare service (EWS) with a general concern that these were not sufficient in all authorities. As well as resources there are wider issues relating to the occupational standards and accreditation of qualifications of those working within the EWS, along with their precise role within an authority. Some EWS deal only with truancy whereas others will have responsibility for a number of areas, which might include exclusions, work permits and licenses, data collection, prosecutions, anti-social behaviour orders and parenting orders. The whole area of the EWS is felt to be in need of substantial review.

The Department for Education and Skills in England, in close consultation with the National Association for Social Workers in Education, has begun work on developing occupational standards. This would need to form a major part of any review.

**Recommendations:**

**S3. Undertake an audit and evaluation of LEAs' spending on attendance issues, particularly the destination of GEST funding and the pilot projects for tackling disaffection.**

**L2. Review the funding, role, responsibilities and training /accreditation system of the educational welfare service in Wales.**

**L3. Clarify and simplify the funding streams used to tackle truancy.**



## **SECTION 2: THE FUTURE APPROACH TO TACKLING TRUANCY IN WALES**

The current methods used to tackle truancy are manifold. Annex 4 is an excerpt from 'Truancy. Short and Long-Term Solutions' by Ken Reid, which shows the range of methods being used in schools in the UK.

In tackling the problems it will be vital to consider the current workload of teachers and not to drive forward new developments too quickly. The current level of resources and budgets will need to be a major consideration.

As truancy is a societal problem, the seeds of long-term projects need to be planted at an early stage to reap the benefits in several years' time. The wide-ranging nature of problems which manifest themselves as truancy mean that more general approaches are a vital part of the solution as well as more specific actions. The main Assembly initiatives on this area are shown in Annex 3 and are not mentioned in detail due to their complexity and the summary nature of this report. However, taking forward the recommendations of this report will need to take full account of these. Of particular interest will be the Extending Entitlement initiative and the development of Young People's Partnerships whose strategies should include proposals for keeping in touch with young people.

A longer-term need in tackling attendance problems is to address curriculum suitability and variety and, in particular, the vocational / academic balance. As there is currently an Assembly project team, looking at future curriculum options for the 14-19 age-group this issue is not addressed in this report. Clearly, maintaining the link between the two projects as they develop will be imperative given their interconnecting natures. It will also be important to consider the alternative curriculum options for younger pupils.

Since there are many possible approaches to tackling truancy and disaffection, it is useful to break down the issue into a number of specific areas:

### **A Level of direction from the Welsh Assembly Government**

Currently LEAs decide how they spend any funding to improve attendance levels, with certain methods being outlined in Circular 3/99. It may be difficult for individual schools or LEAs to ascertain what is the most effective approach and more central government guidance and support is needed on preferred approaches. This should not be at the expense of restricting the flexibility of schools and authorities to adapt their approach to their local circumstances.

### **B Sharing of good and innovative practice**

The Assembly should provide a vehicle to ensure that schools and LEAs can share information on approaches, the most effective methods, case studies etc. This would include information from outside Wales and could involve the use of a website, regular seminars and workshops (probably regional) and



LEA or regional co-ordinators. As this is a fairly complex area, it is recommended for further investigation, rather than being resolved at this stage.

**Recommendation:**

**L4. Establish systems to share good and innovative practice on tackling truancy.**

**C Focusing resources to tackle problems**

The statistics suggest that some areas of Wales (generally those with greater deprivation) have much higher absence rates. A difficult question to resolve is whether the focus should be on bringing these up to a reasonable level rather than more general approaches across all authority areas.

A more focused approach has been used to good effect in Communities First areas. A certain amount of focusing of resources is inherent in GEST funding as the formula contains indicators of deprivation. More work is needed to ascertain whether further focusing of resources would be more effective.

**Recommendation:**

**L5. Carry out a pilot on reducing absences in two schools to assess the extent to which this is possible and to help evaluate how funding should be focused.**

**D Balance between short-term and long-term solutions**

Concentration on long-term solutions, such as training of staff, establishing co-ordinators or intervention at earlier ages, has the potential for ultimately reaping greater benefits but this would need to be balanced against the fact that ongoing day-to-day problems cannot be ignored. A combination of short-term and long-term approaches is recommended and the recommendations in this paper have been split broadly into those two categories, although this is a simplification as there is much crossover between the two.

**E Intervention at an early age**

The approaches taken by the Assembly should tackle attendance problems at primary as well as secondary schools as the early identification of problems would help avoid escalation of problems and development of persistent truancy. The transition between primary and secondary school is of particular concern and the Assembly's Narrowing the Gap initiative which reported on October 17<sup>th</sup> will form an important basis for future work as will future developments on the forthcoming Assembly project which will look specifically at key stage 2/3 transition.

It is important that information on pupils with poor attendance records is passed from primary schools to secondary schools at the time of pupils making the transition, as being aware of problems at an early stage is vital in

avoiding future problems. There is some evidence that this is not happening in all cases.

The focus of the work of the Education Welfare Service is an important aspect in terms of the balance between working with primary or secondary school pupils. In addition there is a difficult decision to be made as to whether to work with 'hardcore' truants rather than those who are more reactive/sporadic.

**Recommendation:**

**S4. Undertake an audit of the methods of passing information between primary and secondary schools on individual pupils' attendance.**

**L6. Increase the level of intervention at primary school level and in particular put systems in place to ensure that individual pupils' attendance figures are shared between primary and secondary schools.**

**F Evaluation and pilots of methods**

There are currently few resources available for the evaluation of methods. Sharing best practice would be a form of evaluating methods but looking at the projects funded by the GEST programme would also give useful information. Ten pilot projects to tackle disaffection have recently been approved throughout Wales and evaluation of these will also be important.

**Recommendation:**

**S3. Undertake an audit and evaluation of LEAs' spending on attendance issues, particularly the destination of GEST funding and the pilot projects for tackling disaffection**

**G Audit of LEAs and schools' policies**

Schools and LEAs will generally have a written policy on attendance issues. There was some doubt however as to how up to date these were and whether the quality was consistent throughout Wales. The extent to which the policies of individual schools tie-in with those of the LEA would also merit further audit. It would be useful to have a sample of a policy on a web-site to act as a guide to authorities and schools wishing to develop their own.

Providing training to staff, particularly to those newly qualified or new to a school, on the policies and the classification of absences would be a major tool in tackling absences. In addition, training governors in the issues involved would assist in providing a supportive environment for schools to work within.

**Recommendations:**

**S5. Undertake an audit of schools' and LEAs' attendance policies, how up-to-date these are and how well they link together.**

## **H      Advisory group on attendance**

The task and finish group, as suggested by its name, will have a limited life span, which will end with the preparation of this report. There is a need for an ongoing advisory group which could advise on an action plan to take forward the recommendations in this paper, many of which are long-term, as well as to advise on new sources of research and development of policy. It is envisaged that this would meet on a six-monthly basis, but perhaps more often in the short-term until it was established.

### **Recommendation:**

**S6.      Set-up a group to advise, on a regular basis, on strategy, best practice and to consider ongoing research.**

## **I      Multi-agency working**

A large number of organisations are potentially involved in cases of truancy and very often this can be confusing to individual teachers and others involved in a co-ordination role. More work is needed to clarify the processes and to provide a framework within which all the relevant professionals will be able to work. The development of Young People's Partnerships will be an important element in this. The link with health authorities is also an important area to strengthen.

### **Recommendation:**

**L7.      Develop a framework for multi-agency working, including the necessary training elements.**

## **J      The legal approach**

In cases of persistent parent-condoned truancy a possible approach would be for LEAs to pursue legal action. This should only be used as a last resort, however, as there are many possible pitfalls. It is vital that any LEAs who decide to take this approach consider how the socio-economic circumstances of parents and families affect the reasons for the non-attendance and whether to pursuing a prosecution is the best way forward. Perhaps the favoured result of taking cases to court would be an agreement from parents to ensure that their children return to school on a regular basis. However, the decision on the action to be taken will ultimately lie with magistrates.

The time taken for cases to be heard in court, with many taking up to 9 months, is clearly a problem. It would appear that this is due to the legal action on attendance cases generally being used to fill-in court time when convenient. The process could be radically speeded up if magistrates' courts heard these cases consecutively on the same day. The Assembly would need to work with the Lord Chancellor's Department to resolve this issue as they have the responsibility for magistrates' courts. An additional aspect of any review would be the link between the educational welfare services and

magistrate courts clerks as cases are more likely to pass smoothly through the courts if the clerks have access to the relevant background information.

The legislation involved in pursuing cases is at present confusing. It would be of great benefit to clarify and simplify this as far as this is possible.

A favoured approach is the use of truancy sweeps, which involve police and the educational welfare service patrolling designated areas and questioning any children they see about their reasons for not being in school. Any children who do not have a good reason are returned to school. Whilst this may not always be a successful approach for hardcore truants, who may leave the school shortly after being returned, it is believed to be a good deterrent for first time or early offenders as well as being a highly visible approach. In some cases truancy sweeps have picked up children in the process of committing crimes.

Running truancy sweeps throughout the whole of Wales, including perhaps a national sweep taking place on one particular day, would send a clear message that the issue is being taken seriously. As the majority of LEAs are currently using truancy sweeps it is hoped that it would be possible to adopt such an approach. This will need to be negotiated with individual LEAs as it is their decision (and not the police authorities) to perform a truancy sweep.

Stationing police permanently at schools where problems are particularly acute is not felt to be necessary in Wales. The current approach of police keeping in touch with schools through Schools Liaison Officers is considered to be sufficient. The police's involvement with schools will be explored further through the implementation of the Assembly's Substance Misuse Strategy.

#### **Recommendations:**

**S7. Consider the approaches to be used in pursuing legal action on parent-condoned truancy cases.**

**S8. Perform truancy sweeps on a regular basis in each LEA.**

**L8 Review the process of taking attendance cases through magistrates' courts, including the link between magistrates' clerks and the educational welfare service and the timetable for hearing attendance cases.**



## **ANNEX 1**

### **ATTENDANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

<b>Cilla Davies:</b>	INCLUDE (Development consultant)
<b>Pru Davis:</b>	HMI, Estyn
<b>Anne Griffiths:</b>	Education Social Work Service, Denbighshire County Council (Welsh co-ordinator of National Association of Social Workers in Education)
<b>Mark Hoban:</b>	Careers Wales, Cardiff and Vale services
<b>Chris Howard:</b>	Standing Conference for Education in Wales, Head of Lewis Boys School, Pengam, Caerphilly
<b>Peter James:</b>	Education Social Work Service, Cardiff County Council
<b>Chris Llewelyn:</b>	Head of Education, Welsh Local Government Association
<b>Paul Mulrany:</b>	Head of Alun School, Flintshire
<b>Ken Reid:</b>	Deputy Principal, Swansea Institute of Higher Education
<b>Elaine Reynolds:</b>	Mountain Ash Comprehensive, Rhondda Cynon Taff
<b>Iain Sewell:</b>	Chief Inspector, Dyfed-Powys Police

### **Welsh Assembly Government**

<b>Alan Lansdown/ Graham Davies:</b> (Chair)	Pupil Support Division
<b>Jennifer Allen:</b>	Pupil Support Division
<b>Alison Clash:</b>	Pupil Support Division
<b>Nicola Prosser:</b>	Pupil Support Division
<b>Suzanne Chisholm / Mark Christopher:</b>	Youth Policy Team
<b>Jeff Davies:</b>	Police Liaison Officer



## ANNEX 2

### STATISTICS ON ABSENCE RATES IN WALES

**Table 1 : Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary and special schools**

Local authority	Percentage of school sessions missed due to:					
	All absences			Unauthorised absence		
	1998/99	99/2000	2000/01	1998/99	99/2000	2000/01
Isle of Anglesey	9.1	9.2	10.1	1.3	1.6	1.4
Gwynedd	8.8	8.3	8.7	1.0	1.0	1.0
Conwy	9.7	9.6	9.9	0.9	0.7	1.1
Denbighshire	9.6	9.1	10.9	1.2	1.2	1.3
Flintshire	8.8	8.8	9.2	0.8	0.8	0.7
Wrexham	8.6	9.6	10.1	0.9	1.0	1.1
Powys	9.3	8.6	9.3	1.0	0.8	0.7
Ceredigion	9.4	8.6	8.4	0.7	0.7	0.7
Pembrokeshire	9.3	9.3	9.9	0.9	1.1	2.5
Carmarthenshire	10.1	9.8	10.0	0.5	0.7	0.8
Swansea	12.4	11.0	11.7	2.3	1.9	2.5
Neath Port Talbot	10.6	10.1	10.4	1.2	1.1	1.0
Bridgend	9.6	9.7	9.4	1.3	1.5	1.6
The Vale of Glamorgan	10.1	9.7	9.8	1.0	1.2	1.4
Cardiff	12.8	12.1	12.0	3.0	3.6	3.8
Rhondda Cynon Taff	11.8	11.0	11.6	1.9	1.9	2.0
Merthyr Tydfil	12.0	10.3	11.1	0.8	0.4	0.3
Caerphilly	12.1	11.5	11.6	1.7	1.8	2.0
Blaenau Gwent	12.9	12.1	11.5	2.5	2.7	1.9
Torfaen	10.0	9.5	10.3	1.1	1.1	1.2
Monmouthshire	8.2	8.8	9.4	0.8	0.5	0.4
Newport	11.3	10.3	10.8	2.3	1.8	1.5
Wales <sup>(3)</sup>	10.6	10.1	10.4	1.5	1.5	1.6

(3) includes independent schools

**Table 2 : Absenteeism by pupils of compulsory school age in all maintained secondary schools, by proportion entitled to free school meals, 2000/01**

Proportion entitled to free school meals	All absences	Unauthorised absence	Number of schools
under 10%	8.2	0.5	50
10%-15%	9.5	1.1	53
15%-20%	10.4	1.4	42
20%-30%	12.0	2.2	59
over 30%	14.4	4.3	25

Source : Pupils' Attendance Record, School Census, National Assembly





## ANNEX 3

### INITIATIVES AND SOURCES OF FUNDING USED TO TACKLE TRUANCY AND DISAFFECTION IN WALES, 2002-03

Initiative	Amount	Notes
Grants for Education Support and Training	10.86	Activity 5 : Tackling Social Disadvantage (covers Youth and Community Workers, Youth Access Initiative, Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant, Attendance, Protection and Looked After Children)
Disaffection grant	0.5	Funding for 10 pilot projects tackling disaffection
Children and Youth Partnership, Youth Access Initiative, Play, Sure Start and Child Care Strategy	35.93	From 2003-04, these will be brought together under the Cymorth initiative
Children and Young People	1.76	
Extending Entitlement	2.14	
Children First Programme	16.26	
New Opportunities Funding (Lottery)	2.2	
Youth Gateway Project	4 (est.)	This is an estimate based on previous years as the amount spent on this area is no longer available separately. Targets have been set for the number of pupils to be included in the project (1,500 age under 16; 4,000 age 16 and over).
Basic Skills Agency	10	
<u>Local Govt. Settlement</u> Education psychology service / assessments and statementing	9.75*	These are planned budgets for <b>2001-02</b> as reported by local authorities to the Assembly on the Section 52 return.
Pupil Referral Units / Behaviour Support Plans	8.81*	
Education Otherwise than at School	4.77*	
Excluded pupils	.43*	
Pupil Support	1.18*	
Education Welfare Service	5.01*	
<u>Home Office / Police Authority</u> Safer Communities Initiative / Positive Futures / Communities Against Drugs	6.3	Doesn't include expenditure on truancy sweeps which is not known centrally
The 14-19 Project team		The project is looking at the wider aspects of the curriculum for 14-19 year olds, particularly the balance between academic and vocational subjects
Narrowing the Gap		Report on dealing with differences in attainment across Wales, particularly at key stage 3
Key stage 2/3 transition		Best practice in handling changes between primary and secondary schools

\* for 2001-02



## **ANNEX 4**

### **100 PLUS SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS CURRENTLY USED IN SCHOOLS**

**Taken from 'Truancy, short and long term solutions' by Ken Reid**

- 1 First day response
- 2 Personal and social education programmes
- 3 Utilisation of colour-coded groups
- 4 Corrective schemes to overcome literacy and numeracy
- 5 Use of the Web eg Plato concept = Independent Learning Systems
- 6 The use of classroom assistants
- 7 Mentoring programmes
  - (a) - adults/pupils
  - (b) - Connexions
  - (c) - sixth formers, younger pupils
  - (d) - able pupils with less able
  - (e) - parents with pupils
  - (f) - former pupils
  - (g) - provided by outside business: business link mentors
  - (h) - teenage sports leaders
  - (i) - the 'grey army'
  - (j) - mobilising the voluntary sector
  - (k) - undergraduates with pupils
  - (l) - young carers scheme
- 8 The use of role play
- 9 Incentive initiatives – whole school, year, form, pupil etc
- Positive reinforcement schemes
- 10 Use of at-risk registers/measures
- 11 Return to school policies
- 12 Reintegration strategies
- 13 Managing school transfers
- 14 Managing subject choices effectively for GCSEs
- 15 Improving special needs facilities
- 16 Second chance opportunities
- 17 Projecting attendance targets
- 18 Use of homework clubs and ICT
- 19 Summer school initiatives
- 20 Utilising pupils' common rooms and learning support centres
- 21 Breakfast clubs
- 22 After school clubs (ice skating, drama etc)
- 23 Work-related curriculum strategies
- 24 Key skills lessons
- 25 Appointing a home school co-ordinator
- 26 Red lists – saving 20 pupils at a time
- 27 E-mail or text message support
- 28 Flexible tuition times
- 29 After hours support tutors or clubs
- 30 Using local sports clubs

- 31 Presenting attendance certificates
- 32 Half day rewards
- 33 Suggestion box schemes
- 34 Use of foundation programmes
- 35 Afro/Caribbean/Asian Liaison Officers
- 36 Student progress planners
- 37 Viewmaster – IT lesson initiative
- 38 Buddy system
- 39 Truancy Buster Scheme
- 40 Closer FE school links
- 41 Management of learning programmes scheme
- 42 Utilising external volunteers (eg Age Concern) to manage first day absence
- 43 Objective 3 funding
- 44 Improving the quality of registration time
- 45 Parental fines
- 46 New Labour's key policies on truancy
- 47 Truancy watch/Truancy sweeps
- 48 EWO interviewing pupil(s) parent(s) in school time together
- 49 Establishing an attendance hot line with local shops
- 50 Spot checks
- 51 Creating a pupils Schools Council
- 52 Specialist pastoral training for staff on 'sensitive' issues
- 53 Provision of free bus passes
- 54 Using legal powers decisively
- 55 Use of security firms
- 56 Limiting school exit points and monitoring school transitions
- 57 Home school, parent-pupil, pupil-school contracts
- 58 Developing strategies for punctuality/combating lateness
- 59 Managing school transfers
- 60 Formation of anti-truancy teams
- 61 Utilising paging system
- 62 One-to-one experiences – case reviews
- 63 Inter-agency co-operation
- 64 Using specialist in-school projects
- 65 Utilising social workers in schools
- 66 Improved health checks
- 67 Appointment of specialist staff –
  - Attendance support teachers
  - Attendance support secretary
  - Specialist counsellors
- 68 Special needs assistants
- 69 Extension of primary school practice
- 70 Compensatory programmes
- 71 School-based review
- 72 School-based questionnaires
- 73 Tackling social exclusion
- 74 Inclusive school policies: Social Inclusion Unit
- 75 Using pupil panels
- 76 Governing Body review on attendance

77	School Trips
78	Use of stickers and badges
79	Personal congratulation schemes
80	Utilising the Internet
81	Attendance notice boards
82	Attendance cups
83	Attendance league tables
84	Attendance panel
85	Pupils' photographs
86	School newsletter – attendance section
87	Parents' evening on attendance or parental days
88	Detentions
89	End of day registrations
90	Business sponsorship
91	Years 10 and 11 projects
92	Missing from lesson slips
93	Attendance tribunals
94	Staggered start times
95	Policies for habitual truants
96	'Catch up' unit
97	Consistency of staff policies
98	Staff absenteeism
99	Involving community policeman in school
100	Use of external consultant
101	Letters to parents
102	"Premiership"
103	Truancy watch schemes
104	Arrivals and Departure Lounge
105	Parental convoys
106	Good and poor attenders runs
107	Truancy call
108	Quiet room
109	Online registers/swipe systems
110	Phone master
111	Asthma clinics
112	Parental sit-ins
113	Reduction in illegal working
114	Pearson Technology Development
115	The Scottish Shilling
116	Pacific Institute Programme
117	Success maker
118	All the year round learning
119	Use of pupil referral units



## **ANNEX 5**

### **PROVISIONAL ACTION PLAN**

The Attendance Task and Finish Group produced its report in October 2002. This plan outlines how the 16 recommendations contained in the report will be taken forward. It is provisional in nature as changes to the actions and timetables may be necessary as a result of further consultation with partners on specific details.

The plan needs to be considered alongside the main report. The numbering system for the recommendations originally used in the report is retained throughout. A summary of actions is contained in Table A.

### **Monitoring Arrangements**

A new group will be set-up, as recommended in the report to advise on strategy, best practice and to consider ongoing research (see S6 below). The monitoring of progress against the action plan will be added to their remit. This will meet once a term with the first meeting taking place in the summer term 2003.

### **Short-term recommendations**

**S1. Simplify the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on classifying absences and consider the use of targets and the reporting of progress against these.**

The Welsh Assembly Government will begin revising Circular 3/99, Pupil Support and Social Inclusion, early in 2003. To tie in with the proposed timetable of these revisions it is proposed that a working group is brought together in March to propose the changes required. These will then be put out to consultation before a final recording system is agreed. As well as adapting the guidance it will be necessary to send a letter to all LEAs and schools in advance of the 2003-04 academic year to ensure they are using the new classification system. Arrangements will also need to be made to make any necessary adaptations to electronic registration systems.

**Working group to be run in March 2003. Letter to all schools / LEAs by end May 2003**



**S2. Establish how many primary schools have readily available figures on attendance rates.**

Discussions between Pupil Support Division and LEAs suggest that the majority of primary schools are already providing attendance figures to LEAs. The Task and Finish Group agreed that information on primary school attendance is essential, particularly in the context of focusing more on intervention at an early age, (see L6 below). It was agreed, therefore, that it was not necessary to obtain more detailed information on this area but instead the National Assembly for Wales should begin steps to collect the information from primary schools.

It is intended to collect 2002-03 data retrospectively. An assessment will be needed as to whether this has been recorded on a consistent basis across all schools. Otherwise the aim will need to be to collect data from the 2003-04 academic year on. It is hoped that as most primary schools are already providing the information to LEAs they can be used as the source and as such there will be no new burden on schools. In the longer term the Pupil Level Annual School Census system is likely to prove the most efficient means of collecting attendance information from individual schools.

**Data collection for 2002-03 to be collected annually from June 2003**

**S3. Undertake an audit and evaluation of LEAs' spending on attendance issues, particularly the destination of GEST funding and the pilot projects for tackling disaffection.**

A full evaluation of LEAs spending on attendance issues is potentially highly complex and perhaps should be considered as a long-term possibility. In the short-term the greater priority is that the spending of GEST funding should be transparent. To satisfy this need each LEA will be asked to make available a report detailing how all GEST funding for Activity 5D School Attendance and Behaviour has been spent. This will become an annual commitment.

The 9 authorities who received funding for pilot projects to tackle disaffection will also be asked to provide regular reports on the progress of the projects along with an evaluation once the project has been fully established. The reports and evaluations will be made available to all on the National Assembly for Wales' website.

**Report on GEST spending for 2002-03 by June 2003. Initial progress reports on disaffection pilot projects to be put on website by September 2003**

**S4.** Undertake an audit of the methods of passing information between primary and secondary schools on individual pupils' attendance.

**S5.** Undertake an audit of schools' and LEAs' attendance policies, how up-to-date these are and how well they link together.

**S7.** Consider the approaches to be used in pursuing legal action on parent-condoned truancy cases.

The above 3 recommendations all involve the collection of information from LEAs. In terms of the burden on LEAs the preferred approach would therefore be to wrap them together in one survey. As the information collected will be useful for feeding into discussions on the revisions of Circular 3/99 this is one of the actions with the greatest urgency.

#### **March 2003**

**S6.** Set-up a group to advise, on a regular basis, on strategy, best practice and to consider ongoing research.

It is proposed that this should meet 3 times a year, preferably at the beginning of each term, starting with the initial meeting in the Summer term, 2003.

As discussed above, the group's role will also be extended to consider progress against this action plan.

The members of the current taskforce will be invited to join the new advisory group or nominate a replacement from the same organisation or performing a similar role elsewhere in Wales. Also the membership will be expanded to include a primary school head as well as someone from Governors Wales, ideally a parent-governor.

#### **Termly meetings from summer 2003**

**S8.** Perform truancy sweeps on a regular basis in each LEA.

The majority of Welsh LEAs are already carrying out regular sweeps in their area. A week of sweeps throughout all LEAs would be a useful way of highlighting the issue of truancy and the need to take it seriously. It would also be an opportunity to develop best practice guidelines for undertaking sweeps, which would include aspects such as working with police, use of language with parents and children, information gathering, methods of reintroducing pupils and follow-up action within schools. These guidelines could be encompassed in the revisions to Circular 3/99.

**Develop guidelines on truancy sweeps between March and May 2003.**

**Wales-wide week of truancy sweeps in June 2003.**

## **Long-term recommendations**

**L1. Review and cost the extent of electronic registration throughout Wales, and develop a strategy for extending its use throughout Wales to a certain standard.**

Undertaking a study of electronic registration throughout Wales is likely to be a highly-involved process as a number of packages are currently being used in a variety of ways. An effective review is only likely to be undertaken through an in-depth study involving extensive discussions with each authority. This will need a dedicated resource devoted to the task as opposed to a piece-meal approach from Assembly officials. Ideally a post would be funded for 4-6 months to investigate the issue in depth and advise on a strategy and costs. The post-holder would need to have a reasonable knowledge of technology to be fully effective.

**Study of LEAs in Autumn 2003, with a view to advising strategy for 2004-05 on.**

**L2. Review the funding, role, responsibilities and training /accreditation system of the educational welfare service in Wales.**

As with L1 this review is potentially a large undertaking and would benefit from a dedicated resource over a number of months with the appropriate background in education matters, especially the role of the educational welfare service. The review will need to take into account work currently ongoing across the UK to develop National Occupation Standards for People Delivering a Support Service to Young People.

**Study of LEAs Spring 2004 to advise on future approach by June 2004**

**L3. Clarify and simplify the funding streams used to tackle truancy.**

The simplification of funding streams is the more difficult of the two tasks as it would involve large numbers of people and policies. It, perhaps, should be borne in mind when developing new funding streams as opposed to a specific action. In terms of clarifying funding streams, a simple easy to read guide will be sent to LEAs summarising sources of funding for each Authority and methods of distribution.

**Guide to funding to be sent to LEAs by December 2003**

**L4. Establish systems to share good and innovative practice on tackling truancy.**

There are a number of potential approaches to sharing good practice. In order to ensure that LEAs and schools are sharing practices with all parts of Wales, it would be preferable to have a Wales-wide rather than regional approach. Recent discussions with LEAs suggest that a 'careers-fair' approach may be the best option as this would allow people to pick and choose the areas which they wish to discuss rather than a standard conference approach of a series of talks where not all information may be of interest to everybody.

As well as bringing people together it would be useful to have a store of information on the National Assembly for Wales' web-site. As part of the Narrowing the Gap project, work has already begun on a compendium of school improvement initiatives. This would be a suitable vehicle to expand to include initiatives tackling disengagement / disaffection and attendance issues. The progress and evaluation of the pilot projects to tackle disaffection will also be included on the web-site.

**Run a 'careers-fair' in Autumn 2003. Put good practice on National Assembly for Wales' web-site on an ongoing basis**

**L5.** Carry out a pilot on reducing absences in two schools to assess the extent to which this is possible and to help evaluate how funding should be focused.

The original intention of the recommendation was to fund projects to improve attendance in two schools with very different socio-economic conditions and evaluate the level of change. This would help formulate future strategy on how best to focus funding to tackle attendance issues. There are however a number of approaches currently being undertaken throughout the UK from which information could be gathered on the most effective methods of tackling low attendance and for this reason the objective within this recommendation should be widened to include a consideration of the effectiveness of existing projects. In order to do this effectively, resources will be needed to carry out the initial research. This initial research could then be used to inform whether a further pilot should be carried out as suggested in the recommendation or whether a pilot is no longer necessary as the available evidence points clearly to the preferred approaches.

**Undertake research into the effectiveness of approaches to tackle attendance issues by December 2003. Possible pilot scheme in 2004-05.**

**L6.** Increase the level of intervention at primary school level and in particular put systems in place to ensure that individual pupils' attendance figures are shared between primary and secondary schools.

The Education Strategic Plans and Behaviour Support Plans probably represent the best vehicles for monitoring a strategic move to earlier intervention. A statement has been put into additional information required for Supplementary ESPs for 2004-05 that authorities should give some account of how they plan to tackle the recommendations arising from the Task and Finish Group.

Details on the current practice on passing information between primary and secondary schools will be collected by means of a survey as described for S4 above. The passing of information on attendance from primary to secondary schools should happen as part of the introduction of individual pupil records. All schools are due to be part of the system for 2003-04 and attendance is expected to be one of the core data items from January 2004. However, this will only be an annual figure and schools and LEAs will need to consider whether this is sufficient. Consultation is still ongoing on the introduction of individual pupil records.

**Include statement on following Task and Finish Group's recommendations in Supplementary ESPs, December 2002**  
**Await development of individual pupil records, expected Jan 2004**

**L7. Develop a framework for multi-agency working, including the necessary training elements.**

It will be important to restrict the boundaries of the actions arising from this recommendation as there is great potential for straying beyond the remit of the group into wider areas such as joint working between education and social service departments. The action will be focused on providing good practice guidelines on how various agencies can work together to tackle attendance issues. As there is such a cross-over between attendance issues and disengagement / disaffection the content of such guidelines will need to be clearly defined, taking into account other work going on in this area.

**Workshop on multi-agency working in Autumn 2003**

**L8 Review the process of taking attendance cases through magistrates' courts, including the link between magistrates' clerks and the educational welfare service and the timetable for hearing attendance cases.**

Some work will need to be done in the short-term to react to guidelines for magistrates' courts and youth offending teams being produced by a Department For Education and Skills working group and deciding whether these are appropriate for Wales and fit within our overall aims. DFES are aiming to release the guidelines in March 2003. The Welsh Assembly Government's Pupil Support Division are represented on the working group.

A subsequent group involving all interested parties including Welsh Assembly Government officials, magistrates, and the educational welfare service will be set-up in Wales to discuss the specific approach required in Wales, using the work carried out in England as a starting point.

**Set-up a group to discuss the issues in Summer 2003 with a view to developing guidelines.**

**Table A: Summary of Actions**

<b>Recommendation</b>		<b>Action</b>	<b>Timetable</b>
S1.	Simplify the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance on classifying absences and consider the use of targets and the reporting of progress against these.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working group to propose the changes required for inclusion in revised guidance</li> <li>letter to all LEAs and schools advising them of changes</li> </ul>	Mar 2003  May 2003
S2.	Establish how many primary schools have readily available figures on attendance rates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collect attendance data from primary schools</li> </ul>	January 2003 to Sept 2003
S3.	Undertake an audit and evaluation of LEAs' spending on attendance issues, particularly the destination of GEST funding and the pilot projects for tackling disaffection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LEAs to report on GEST spending for 2002-03.</li> <li>Initial progress reports on disaffection projects on web-site</li> </ul>	June 2003 Sept 2003
S6.	Set-up a group to advise, on a regular basis, on strategy, best practice and to consider ongoing research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set-up group to meet once a term</li> </ul>	From Summer '03
S4.	Undertake an audit of the methods of passing information between primary and secondary schools on individual pupils' attendance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake survey of LEAs</li> </ul>	March 2003
S5.	Undertake an audit of schools' and LEAs' attendance policies, how up-to-date these are and how well they link together.		
S7.	Consider the approaches to be used in pursuing legal action on parent-condoned truancy cases.		
S8.	Perform truancy sweeps on a regular basis in each LEA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop best-practice guidelines</li> <li>Undertake Wales-wide week of sweeps</li> </ul>	Mar-May '03 June 2003
L1.	Review and cost the extent of electronic registration throughout Wales, and develop a strategy for extending its use throughout Wales to a certain standard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish temporary post / contract to undertake review and advise on strategy</li> </ul>	Autumn 2003

L2.	Review the funding, role, responsibilities and training /accreditation system of the educational welfare service in Wales.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish temporary post / contract to undertake review and advise on strategy</li> </ul>	Spring 2004
L3.	Clarify and simplify the funding streams used to tackle truancy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guide to funding to be sent to LEAs</li> </ul>	Dec 2003
L4.	Establish systems to share good and innovative practice on tackling truancy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Run a 'careers-fair' on methods of tackling attendance issues</li> <li>Put good practice on National Assembly for Wales' web-site</li> </ul>	Autumn 2003 Ongoing
L5.	Carry out a pilot on reducing absences in two schools to assess the extent to which this is possible and to help evaluate how funding should be focused.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake research project to evaluate methods of tackling attendance issues</li> <li>Pilot scheme (dependent on above)</li> </ul>	Jul to Dec 2003 2004-05
L6.	Increase the level of intervention at primary school level and in particular put systems in place to ensure that individual pupils' attendance figures are shared between primary and secondary schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Add statement to Education Strategic Plans for additional information on plans to follow Task and Finish Group's recommendations</li> <li>Await development of individual pupil records</li> </ul>	Dec 2002 Jan 2004
L7.	Develop a framework for multi-agency working, including the necessary training elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set-up workshop to develop best-practice guidelines</li> </ul>	Autumn 2003
L8	Review the process of taking attendance cases through magistrates' courts, including the link between magistrates' clerks and the educational welfare service and the timetable for hearing attendance cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set-up a group to discuss the issues with a view to developing guidelines.</li> </ul>	Summer 2003



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

## THE ATTENDANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP:

### FINAL REPORT AND PROVISIONAL ACTION PLAN

- Audience:** Local education authorities, governing bodies, school staff, the education welfare service, parents and all other parties involved in encouraging children to attend school.
- Overview:** The document represents the findings and recommendations of an expert group of practitioners involved in tackling truancy and its effects. A provisional action plan to take forward the recommendations is attached at Annex 5.
- Action required:** For information. Further details will be provided to relevant parties on taking forward the action plan.

**Further information:** Please contact:

Graham Davies  
Pupil Support Division  
Welsh Assembly Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ  
Graham.davies@wales.gsi.gov.uk  
029 20826897

**More copies:** Please contact:

Rachel Pass  
Pupil Support Division  
Welsh Assembly Government  
Cathays Park  
Cardiff  
CF10 3NQ  
Rachel.pass@wales.gsi.gov.uk  
029 20823835

**Related documents:** National Assembly for Wales Circular 3/99: Pupil Support and Inclusion, September 1999