

## Hansard Society – AMs in Schools

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote innovative ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded New Initiatives Fund grants to local and community groups as well as national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the Hansard Society's AMs in Schools project, funded by the New Initiatives Fund. The report highlights the aims and objectives of AMs in Schools and the achievements of the project.

### The grant

The Hansard Society is an independent educational charity, which aims to promote effective Parliamentary democracy. The Hansard Society runs both a successful Members of Parliament (MP) and Members of European Parliament (MEP) in schools programmes and wished to pilot a similar Assembly Members (AM) project in Wales.

The Electoral Commission agreed to grant a sum of £5,582 to the Hansard Society to complete the AMs in Schools project and an amount of **£5,582** was paid out. This grant was awarded specifically to develop a resource pack, suitable for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils, to support visits of Welsh AMs to schools. The pack was designed for pupils, teachers and AMs to use in preparation of these visits.

This pilot project ran over a period of 12 months, from April 2003 to March 2004.

### Aims and objectives

The primary objectives of the project, as set down in the application, were:

- to develop a resource pack to support the visits of AMs to schools geared mainly for pupils at Key Stage 3, but which can be developed to be suitable for Key Stage 4;
- to ensure the resource pack is suitable for students, teachers and AMs participating in the project;
- to ensure a cross-section of Welsh schools participate in the pilot; and
- to ensure a cross-section of political parties participate in the visits.

The primary aim of the pack was to assist pupils in their preparation for a visit from their AM and to help them take a lead role in shaping the visit. To achieve this, the pack provided teachers with guidance about how to encourage pupils to prepare presentations, research key facts about AMs, prepare questions in advance and be ready to discuss and engage with topical issues of their choice.

The pack also briefed AMs about pupils' level of ability and understanding prior to conducting their visit. This enabled AMs to target their presentations directly to the level of knowledge that the students possessed and delve into more detail as appropriate.

### Target outcomes

The primary long-term outcome of the AMs in Schools project was to increase Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students' understanding of and interest in the democratic process.

### Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by the Project Coordinator, Michael Rafferty. All three participating groups (pupils, teachers and AMs) were interviewed verbally and asked to complete written questionnaires.

### Deliverables

The key deliverables during the grant period were:

- three schools across Wales participated in the pilot of the resource pack;
- approximately 250 students participated;
- six teachers participated; and
- three Welsh AMs participated, one from each of the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats.

**April 2003** – research was started and contacts were developed across Wales to inform the development of the content for the pilot packs.

**May to September 2003** – draft packs were developed in partnership with The Electoral Commission in Wales, the Council for Education in World Citizenship-Cymru and the Education Unit of the National Assembly for Wales.

**October 2003 to March 2004** – pilot visits took place in three schools across Wales representing a wide geographical spread, including urban, rural and Welsh speaking. The three participating schools were:

- Howells School, Cardiff;
- Builth Wells High School, Builth Wells; and
- Ysgol Friars, Gwynedd.

**March 2004** – final evaluation of the pack was conducted and findings from the pilot AM visits to schools collated.

### Project and resource management

The activities of the project were supervised by Fiona Booth, Director of the Citizen Education Programme. The project was managed on a day-to-day basis by the Project Coordinator, Michael Rafferty.

Records of budgeted and actual income and expenditure were maintained and monitored at the Hansard Society's central London offices.

The grant monies were allocated as follows:

- project worker's salary: **£3,977**;
- mailing costs: **£549**;
- pilot visits: **£45**;

- translation: **£306**; and
- production of pack: **£705**.

Total: **£5,582**.

The project delivered its activities within the budget allocated.

### How successful was the project?

#### Short-term outcomes

Overall, the project is a positive step toward increasing both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 pupils' awareness about the Welsh Assembly. Student feedback was extremely positive, teacher feedback was appreciative of the resource and all three participating AMs pledged their support for the project's continuation.

Survey results at the beginning of the project demonstrated that pupils were confused about the role of the Welsh Assembly and the responsibilities of AMs. In fact, many of them stated that they had heard little or nothing about the Welsh Assembly.

By completion of the pilot phase students were able to grasp the role AMs play, the responsibilities they hold and how they fit into Welsh local governance. This was especially relevant in explaining the voting system and the differences between regional and constituency AMs.

These results were a direct consequence of students and AMs utilising the resource pack prior to AM visits. The pack provided useful definitions and case studies, which helped to

focus the group discussions and explain the role of AMs and the Welsh Assembly. The AMs in Schools project worked closely with both schools and teachers in the early stages to develop suitable explanations and age-appropriate vocabulary to clarify the meaning of key concepts such as the difference between Regional and Constituency AMs.

### **Pupil feedback**

The pack, and especially the case studies which focused on group discussion, were very popular with pupils as a way of explaining the role of their AM. The pack also encouraged interactive learning by requiring pupils to develop a presentation on a subject of their choice. This exercise encouraged pupils to draw important connections between local, national and/or international issues and decisions made at the National Assembly for Wales.

### **Teacher feedback**

Although many teachers had initial concerns about how they would fit the pack and activities into their already crowded timetables, in practice they found it to be flexible enough to utilise without great disruption to their lesson planning. Because the resource provided comprehensive step-by-step guidance, teachers were more inclined to take part since very little additional work was required on their part.

Teachers who participated were very encouraging about the success of the resource

pack, which they felt provided a clear focus for pupils' learning while increasing their knowledge about the political process. The case studies also proved popular as a way of introducing pupils to the terminology and initiating group discussion.

### **Assembly Member feedback**

The AMs were enthusiastic about the project and acknowledged the need to engage young people with the work of the Assembly. School visits are an established part of AMs' work and the pack was seen as an excellent way to develop these visits. Also, the AMs who took part in the pilot came from the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru.

The pupil-led nature of the visits provided AMs with a deeper understanding of the issues that concern young people. Pupils were well prepared for the visits and their discussions with AMs were extremely fruitful as they always had plenty of comments and questions, and AMs did not have to prompt them to participate.

Overall, the project was seen as a positive step and all AMs pledged their support for it.

### **Longer-term evaluation**

The long-term impact of the AMs in Schools project has the potential to be great and widespread. Already an estimated 250 students have been impacted by the pilot phase. The Hansard Society has recommended that the

project be rolled-out across Wales and discussions are presently taking place with potential partners to determine appropriate next steps.

If the project is rolled-out to other schools many more students will benefit from the resource pack that has been developed. This is aimed to reach every school in Wales with only limited costs required for upgrading the resource pack as necessary.

The long-term success of the project relies upon schools and teachers devoting adequate time in the curriculum to using the pack. Additionally, student engagement with the project rests greatly on the visit of AMs. Therefore, one of the essential prerequisites for a successful rollout of the project is that AMs remain involved and they are able to arrange suitable times for school visits.

With these caveats in mind, the longer-term outlook appears positive. The Hansard Society has used the pilot to fine-tune its pack and these improvements should lead to more pupils becoming actively involved in the project, especially as the feedback to date has been so uniformly positive. Furthermore, it is the intention of the Hansard Society to continue monitoring the schools that took part in the pilot scheme to see whether contact is maintained with the AM who visited the school.

## Conclusions

The AMs in Schools project intended to develop a resource pack for teachers, students and AMs to be utilised during AM visits to schools. Funding provided by the New Initiatives Fund supported the development, production and pilot of this resource pack and provided for a comprehensive evaluation to assist the effective and efficient rollout of a national initiative.

All participants involved agreed that the content of the resource pack made organising AM visits easier and increased the interaction between pupils and AMs during visits. For teachers who have limited time and resources, a single resource package containing all of the information required to set up an AM visit was invaluable. Teachers were provided with step-by-step guidance about how to successfully undertake a visit by an AM. When they followed the resource pack visits went smoothly and were declared a success by all participants.

Through the evaluation of this project it has been possible to identify a number of elements of good practice and 'lessons learnt' that could be of interest to other organisations or bodies considering replicating this concept.

## Good practice

- Piloting a programme provides opportunities for improvement and gaining buy-in from key stakeholders before trying to roll it out nationally.
- Involving teachers, pupils and AMs in a project's evaluation ensures all perspectives and suggestions are considered.
- Targeting a diverse range of schools ensures that the final result is accessible to many audiences.
- Briefing teachers prior to starting a programme helps ensure that they have the information they need to fully participate and engage their students in the project.

## Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Gathering quantitative data, such as attendance figures and participation statistics from the project's start is critical for conducting an impact assessment at the completion of a project.
- Undertaking questionnaires both before and after implementation provides evidence as to how the project has altered behaviours and attitudes of participants.

### New Initiatives Fund

For further information about this project please contact Fiona Booth at the Hansard Society, or visit [www.hansardsociety.org.uk](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk)

Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of The Electoral Commission can be found at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

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