

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Ian Jones

This term seems to be the season for conferences and consultations and NALDIC has been heavily involved in both areas. This is not necessarily conducive to a tranquil professional existence. On the one hand, a conference input from Stephen Krashen sends you away enthused and optimistic about the future. On the other, the enthusiasm is soon dampened by the impact of the realities of life in the EAL field as another document for consultation drops from the sky (or from the DfES, QCA or TTA). Both of these issues however are equally important for the work of NALDIC. For the first time this year we have run a major conference in addition to the annual conference in November. 'Bilingual Education and UK Schools: Rethinking Perspectives' gave us the opportunity to reflect on the current issues around bilingual education in the United States, inspirationally and entertainingly presented by Stephen Krashen who most of us had only previously seen on *that* video. Viv Edwards and a strong plenary panel from a variety of professional and academic contexts discussed the UK situation. It was a very successful conference and timely, when set in the national context of 'Aiming High' and the National Languages Strategy.

If conferences help to recharge the professional and pedagogic batteries then responding to consultations forces us to clarify our ideas and articulate principles and outline strategies for taking forward the work of NALDIC and the positioning of EAL in the developing UK context. The response to 'Aiming High' for instance, provides us with a basis for engaging members in discussion and developing NALDIC's future position.

The fact that there have been a number of consultation exercises is encouraging in the sense that we are being asked for our views even if we have reservations about the probable outcomes. We are seeing a more open approach by the DfES and a willingness to enter into a dialogue with professional associations on most issues (with the exception of EAL assessment perhaps!) and this is to be welcomed and is worth continuing to build. One of our recent responses was to a DfES consultation on subject specialist associations which has considerable potential for us as a specialist association for EAL.

The consultation on 'Aiming High' has now closed and the responses are now being considered. NALDIC's final response is available on the website and we wait to see whether any of our proposals are included. Whatever the thrust of the strategy itself, its impact may well be determined by two things: the guidance which accompanies it and the reaction at school and LEA level to the changes in the grant itself. An announcement on the future of EMAG is expected in October. Whatever the decision it will have a significant impact on

everyone working in the field as the establishment of a formula for the distribution of the funding whether it is top-sliced or not will inevitably lead to changes in the amount of money LEAs and schools will receive. If the changes are not to result in significant reductions in EAL expertise and bilingual and ethnic minority staff, it is vital that strong guidance is provided to ensure that institutional and LEA responsibilities to the needs of minority ethnic pupils continue to be met. The new Ofsted framework and the obligations placed on schools and LEAs by the Race Relations Amendment Act ought to provide a level of accountability but cannot be relied upon as the only method. NALDIC's view is that for EAL some form of a Code of Practice is essential.

Through various DfES working groups which include professional associations, work is proceeding on the development of the various strands of the National Strategy, in particular the EAL and African Caribbean strands. The first significant development has been the recent announcement of 20 pilot projects for training for mainstream teachers through the National Primary Strategy. This initiative not funded from EMAG involves the appointment of two regional directors and 20 consultants in the pilot authorities. It is intended that the management of the pilots should involve existing local EMA teams as well as the Strategy appointments. This relationship is likely to be key and we await sight of the training programme with interest and how different it is from training programmes already provided at LEA level by existing EAL and EMA consultants. The other issue is how far this type of training, possibly coupled with a further reduction of EAL practitioners on the ground because of funding reductions, generates the view that specialists are no longer needed and class teachers can meet all the EAL needs. The way in which this initiative sits with the welcome proposals, still being developed, for a national specialist qualification for EAL along with whatever guidance is produced will be critical for the future quality and effectiveness of EAL work in schools.