

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Ian Jones

Traditionally, this is not the best time of year for EMAG workers. As well as the day to day concerns of how to support our pupils in a variety of challenging circumstances, spreading ourselves as far as we can while maintaining the quality of our input, this time of year is when an EMAT worker's thoughts turn to funding and job security. Despite the fact that it is three years since the EMAG grant was first devolved to schools, there is still a perception in some institutions that staff funded under the grant are somehow supernumerary and not really part of the school and therefore dispensable the moment there is any slight reduction in funding. In other schools, the grant has to go further to support areas which might previously have been funded from other sources. The problem, as ever, is compounded by the short-term nature of the funding, the late announcement of the amount of the grant and the percentage funded by the DfES. The review of the way education is funded through SSAs, to which NALDIC contributed, has been completed and an announcement is expected shortly. It is hoped that information on EMAG will be available at the end of November. Events in some LEAs recently have done little to reassure EAL staff of their future security.

Not surprisingly, it becomes more difficult to recruit and retain good EAL specialists. For instance, the recently published Ofsted report into professional development in this area of work found that,

'The majority of school- and centre-based courses are now short, stand-alone events. There has been a sharp decline in the number of long-term accredited courses, particularly those for specialist EAL staff. The proportion of EMAG funded staff with appropriate qualifications is now as low as 30% in some LEAs.'
(p.6)

However, there is some encouragement for EAL practitioners in a number of recent developments at the DfES. Three in particular are worth mentioning. In July, NALDIC was invited to attend an Ethnic Minority Attainment Forum organised by Cathy Ashton the government minister responsible for ethnic minority achievement. Despite the fact that EAL was not the main focus of the discussions, we were encouraged by the minister to forward our views to her team. Although this area of responsibility is now transferring to Stephen Twigg, we are told that it remains a high priority. The second development was the appointment of a new team leader, Annabel Burns, to the department's Ethnic Minority Pupils Team. NALDIC has already had some contact with her and we hope this might establish the basis for a productive relationship. Finally, and perhaps more significantly,

the DfES has announced its intention to develop a national strategy for EAL and an appointment has recently been made to a one-year secondment to develop this strategy. This is an important initiative and we hope that NALDIC will be able to make a contribution to this work. As a first step, an invitation to attend NALDIC Conference has already been sent.

In this context, the joint NALDIC/NUT Conference, 'Reasserting Professionalism: Developing an Agenda for Teachers Working for Minority Ethnic Pupils' held in October was a timely event. The DfES was represented by Annabel Burns and although we were not able to discuss the issue of funding in depth, the day was very successful and productive. A key feature of the conference was the launch of the NALDIC publication 'The EAL Teacher: Descriptors of Good Practice' a summary of a research project carried out for the DfES by Charlotte Franson. This work, based on an extensive consultation exercise with practitioners is an important addition to the definition of the role of the EAL teacher and the establishment of EAL as a recognised specialist teaching area.

To end on a really positive note, there has been an excellent response from members to our appeal in NALDIC News 26 for help in taking the work of NALDIC forward. We look forward to meeting them at NALDIC Conference. Thanks to all those who responded and of course we would still welcome further contacts. (ian.jones@rochdale.gov.uk)

Ofsted (Oct 2002) Support for Minority Ethnic Achievement: Continuing Professional Development