

# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR 1

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## Ian Jones

As I have now completed my four-year stint as Chair of NALDIC, this is my last View from the Chair and I will be handing this column over to Steve Cooke. It is probably a good time to take stock of where we are now and where we might be going at a time when there is, on the one hand, a greater recognition of the needs of EAL pupils and, on the other, the threat of greater marginalisation.

From the very beginning, work with bilingual pupils has been a politically as well as an educationally contested area because of its links with nationally and internationally sensitive agendas. As was often the way with UK government policies, the inclusion of Section 11 in the Local Government Act of 1966 and initiatives such as the provision of language centres were as much about managing the impact of migration as they were about humanitarian considerations and an effective approach to meeting the needs of ethnic minority communities.

The landscape has changed significantly over the last few years but underneath political considerations are still at work. The Government has developed its strategy for raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils of which EAL continues to be a substantial element. There has also been a welcome move towards the recognition of the needs of bilingual pupils as a mainstream responsibility for managers and for class and subject teachers. There has been some movement in the provision of specialist courses for serving EAL teachers and for teaching assistants. EAL has become increasingly embedded in the national strategies, work on assessment has been carried out and published and ethnic monitoring has been incorporated into PLASC. The Race Relations Amendment Act has mandated institutions including schools to monitor the impact of their policies and functions on different ethnic groups and to monitor achievement. EMAG funding has been increased slightly and continued to be a ring fenced targeted grant until 2008.

The DfES continues to make positive statements regarding EAL and NALDIC has been consulted and involved at a number of levels. There has, in fact, been encouraging progress on a number of levels. In some senses, then, it could be argued that the profile of EAL has never been higher and, less than ten years ago, many of these initiatives would have been on NALDIC's agenda as something to achieve. However, although significant progress has been made in several areas, the overall picture nationally is unfortunately, far from encouraging. There have been a number of developments in the wider national context, which have impacted significantly on the field of EAL. While

some of these have been positive, rather more have been negative.

While the DfES continues to stress the importance of EAL, the rhetoric is regularly undermined by the impact of many of the policies emanating from the government with contradictions between the messages, the strategic direction and the actual impact of these developing policies.

Progress on achieving our key aims has been limited. On assessment, for instance, our aim for EAL pupils to have the right for their English language development to be appropriately assessed has been further undermined by the DfES' insistence on promoting the QCA steps as an adequate model for EAL assessment against a considerable amount of professional opposition. One of our challenges is to continue to argue for and work to demonstrate an appropriate EAL assessment system in the face of official endorsement of an inadequate one.

Other fundamental challenges involve the failure by the government to embed EAL effectively in ITT and to recognise fully the importance of promoting specialist qualifications at PGCE level which will also have a negative long-term impact. The positive aspects of the incorporation of EAL within the national strategies which help to legitimise it for mainstream teachers are negated by the limitations of this overall strategy which, could lead in the long term to the delivery of EAL by teaching assistants unsupported by teachers with specialist EAL skills and knowledge unless steps to maintain expertise are taken.

Unfortunately, with the changing financial situation, the erosion of EAL expertise in the field is more likely to increase. As qualified and experienced practitioners leave, there seems little prospect of their skills being replaced. There is currently little incentive for new teachers to take up EAL or for serving teachers to transfer into the field. Yet the need continues to increase. We are currently seeing a large influx of EAL pupils from Eastern Europe arriving in areas where EAL has not been a major issue and where EMAG funding is correspondingly low.

The combined effect of reductions in EMAG with the increase in the number of new arrivals from a variety of countries including Eastern Europe into areas where there have been few bilingual pupils is stretching the capacity of many schools and Local Authorities particularly in shire counties. At the same time, reductions in EMAG for many authorities following the implementing of the national formula are beginning to be felt at the classroom level with the prospect of further problems as the reductions continue into future years. Some shire county and urban authorities with large numbers of bilingual students have been particularly hard hit with some schools and authorities looking at redundancies. Even some of the 'winners' are experiencing difficulties where tight LA budgets

are making it difficult to find the matched funding required to obtain the increased grant. In addition, the possibility that in 2008 EMAG will be discontinued as a ring fenced grant and added to the single schools budget will mean spending on EAL would be at the whim of individual head teachers while, within the limited local authority block, it could become a victim of competing priorities and financial constraints. With schools having to accept their responsibility to appoint appropriate staff to meet the needs of bilingual pupils from their available budget rather than rely on EMAG there would be a financial as well as a strategic disincentive to admit EAL students.

The proposals in the White Paper to give greater autonomy to schools, particularly the expansion of academies and foundation schools, together with increased control of admissions and recommendations to increase streaming are likely to disadvantage EAL pupils, particularly beginners. It is unlikely to be long before it is suggested that they should be taught English before they are admitted, thus opening up the prospect of a return to language centres. Moves to increase the involvement of the private sector in education are also unlikely to work for the benefit of bilingual pupils. Market forces tend to act against the interests of those on the margins, particularly when financial success is predicated on academic success as demonstrated through league tables. Admission of the right sort of pupil becomes paramount. Assurances have been given that this will not be allowed to happen, but current arrangements to monitor schools do not provide any reassurance that robust monitoring mechanisms will be established. For example, while schools will be expected to conform to the Admissions code of practice, they will not be mandated to do so. Similarly, the limitations of time imposed on the single conversation gives rise to concerns that the needs of bilingual pupils may slip off the agenda with other improvement issues taking priority over issues of equality.

In addition, government education policies in many cases have a negative impact on the field of EAL. For example, while the Race Relations Amendment Act requires schools to monitor the achievement of their ethnic minority pupils the policy of minimum intervention only *encourages* schools to set targets for these pupils. Similarly while the conditions attached to the EMA Grant put responsibilities on schools in relation to raising the achievement of minority ethnic pupils, there is no rigorous monitoring mechanism to ensure that the grant is being spent effectively. The situation is likely to become even more difficult should the proposals set out in the latest White Paper be implemented.

At work here is a fundamental contradiction between policies in relation to inclusion and cohesion aimed at bringing schools communities and individuals together, with policies of autonomy, competition and individual independence which are likely to do the opposite.

The problem for work which can be easily marginalised, is that it requires strong and positive promotion. This is in conflict with a government policy to increase the independence of schools from local authority control and influence and increasingly puts at risk the needs of more vulnerable groups of pupils on whose behalf LEAs have been able to exercise responsibility. However, it will be interesting to compare the political commitment and rigorous implementation in relation to the likely introduction of synthetic phonics with the approach to EAL.

However, political imperatives in relation to the prevention of terrorism and the increasing number of newly arrived early stage EAL pupils are likely to require a managed interventionist approach while the marginalisation of communities will be counterproductive. It will be interesting to see what attempts to square this particular circle are made in the next few years. As a subject association, NALDIC has to engage with the pragmatics of moving forward the agenda for EAL pupils and with the government agencies whose strategic developments will impact on those pupils. If our advocacy role is to continue to develop, a balance has to be struck between marginalisation and incorporation through the adoption of a position of constructive challenge in relation to current and developing policies and strategies and those that might emerge in the future. It is thus more important than ever that NALDIC remains a strong and active organisation able to retain and increase its membership in order to continue to develop its role as a subject association and an advocate for EAL practitioners and bilingual pupils in the face of these challenges and to continue to work towards the recognition of EAL as a distinctive area of the curriculum, the need for specialist training from ITT onwards linked on a continuum of professional development for all teachers and other professionals and for adequate funding for these aims to be achieved.

## VIEW FROM THE CHAIR 2

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NALDIC, but also to ensure that adequate funding is made available to employ that expertise and build expertise for the future.

### Steve Cooke

In his valedictory view from the chair, Ian has provided us with the kind of cogent and forthright analysis that we have come to expect from him. One of the many qualities that Ian has brought to the role of Chair is his ability to see both the big picture and the details of the political, social and educational context in which EAL learning and teaching takes place. In addition to this, he has used this grasp of the issues to make a major contribution to establishing and maintaining the dialogue that exists between NALDIC and a variety of organisations and institutions and has been instrumental in enabling NALDIC to be an influential if sometimes dissenting presence. Ian's contribution to NALDIC has been a major one and on behalf of the membership I think we owe him a huge vote of thanks for his time as Chair.

Ian rightly points out that while there have been some positive developments, that we cannot feel entirely optimistic about the future. Indeed it is rumoured at this time that the DfES is going to fail to deliver its commitment to indicative EMAG funding and therefore effectively cut national provision for 2006 to 2008. At a time when the numbers of children arriving in schools from Eastern and Southern Europe is apparent to all, it would be somewhat surprising if the Government saw fit to reduce provision for EAL teaching rather than strengthen it in urban areas and extend it in shire counties. Given that, the UK skills shortage is unlikely to be resolved in the near future other than by attracting employees from the European Union and further afield, it seems cynical, to say the least, to expect migrant families (and families from established bilingual communities) to be happy with the prospect of their children having either no or reduced access to specialist EAL teaching.

Freedom of movement and employment within the expanding European Union suggests that education policy as a whole in this country should be geared up to become more responsive to linguistic diversity. If current trends continue, a growing number of schools will need to embrace more students with a range of nationalities and ethnicities who are at various stages of acquiring English. This is a serious challenge for the Government. If it aspires to develop a 'world class education system' then the system must cater for all children and families who seek to use it, and not just those whose material circumstances allow them to exercise their preferences. Perhaps then, for the Government, 'entitlement' rather than 'choice' should be the watchword for the future. In rising to this challenge, the Government needs not only to tap the expertise of EAL practitioners and organisations like