



DAG Annual Assembly 2003

Record of the meeting held in the Main Council Chamber, County Hall, Exeter on Sat. March 22nd

The Chairman, **Martin Weiler**, gave a warm welcome to all those present, prepared to give their free time to governance and to DAG. June 16th would see the tenth anniversary of DAG - a considerable achievement in the establishment and sustaining of a credible voice for governors within Devon. He saw DAG as part of ' Team Devon ' working constructively with, but independent of, the Devon LEA and Devon Governor Services. He paid tribute to previous chairs and to Executive members past and present. The Executive had been a sound mix of experience and new blood which had provided DAG both with continuity and the opportunity to remain ' fresh '. In particular he wanted to mention two long-standing Executive members, Carol Hicks and David Duttson, both of whom were standing down after a long period of Executive service. He believed in the importance of changing Chair on a regular basis and was, therefore, standing down after two years. He commended the Executive's recommendation of Douglas Lomax as Chair for the following year. Finally he gave special thanks to the County Secretary for his continuing efforts on behalf of DAG. The Executive had been anxious to appoint an Assistant Secretary (the nature of the role to be negotiated) and asked delegates to help identify possible applicants.

Irsi Watson proposed that the **Minutes of the 2002 AGM** be approved. This was seconded by Roger Adcock and agreed nem con. The **County Secretary** then presented his summary of what he perceived to be the main activities of DAG over the past year (**copy circulated**)

Ian Rogers, DAG Treasurer, presented the **verified accounts for the Year ending December 31st 2002**. Copies were circulated and available for all present. DAG finances were supported by all schools who subscribed to Devon Governor Services, at the rate of £1 - 25 per member of each Governing body. In addition the LEA had given an increased grant to DAG in acknowledgement of the enhanced role it played in supporting education within Devon. The accounts revealed both increased activity and planned expenditure for DAG work with the intention to use DAG funds to support one or more projects during the coming year. The accounts were adopted unanimously and the Chairman thanked Ian for his efficient and thorough work throughout the past year. It was further agreed unanimously to **reappoint Mr. Michael Steed as Verifier for the accounts** for the coming year. Thanks were recorded to Mr. Steed for his continued work and willingness to support DAG.

Election for the Executive Committee. The Chairman thanked the Executive Committee for their work over the year, in particular those no longer able to continue their role within the Committee. Delegates had a list of proposals for the new committee representing a spread of geographical, educational and nomination backgrounds. Several governors present also offered their services for the Executive. He proposed that the assembly endorse the amended list in its entirety. This was agreed nem com.

There followed a break for tea / coffee.

After the break the Chairman welcomed **Tony Smith** as **Guest Speaker** on this, the last occasion he could address DAG as Director for Education, Arts & Libraries for Devon. He praised the way in which Tony had encouraged and supported the growth of DAG during his tenure of office. Tony began by expressing his appreciation of and respect for the work of DAG and then proceeded to give his view of the current opportunities and challenges facing governors in the work. Following the presentation the Chairman invited members to raise any **issues of concern** so as to provide the Executive with items of focus for the coming months. Both the presentation and question and answer session covered similar key points summarised as follows:

- Tony Smith praised those who had worked so hard on Devon's Fair Funding campaign and DAG's role in that. However, there was still such 'unfairness' in the current levels of supposed Fair Funding! Some delegates felt that this was an issue that needed to be addressed particularly from the small schools' perspective but others argued that all schools were equally affected. He also stressed the high levels of expenditure on capital building projects (about £50 million) that had occurred over recent years and were planned for future years
Funding concerns were also highlighted by him and by delegates, in particular:
 - the level of school transport costs
 - that there might be withdrawal of government financial support for threshold payments this year
 - that the knock-on effect teacher pay rises would give to salaries for leadership within schools
 - that problems in differentiation of levels of teacher competency would be fraught with difficulty
- Federation of schools. Devon's falling pupil role should prompt us to consider working collaboratively with other schools, possibly by sharing employees. He asked whether governors should be more proactive in collaboration initiatives and whether we should think more strategically in our localities to meet the needs of our schools. He suggested that possibly the very survival of some small schools may depend on future collaboration and that there needed to be more discussion about this.
- There has been considerable progress in Devon with regard to the provision of places for children from the age of 3. Tony felt, however, that we need to look at continental practice where early years work gives more emphasis to nurturing and to the development of social learners than to formal education
- Lengthy consideration was given to annual review visits and target setting. There were conflicting views amongst delegates about the place of target setting within the school culture and the effects of target setting on institutions. On some occasions targets conflict with individual pupil needs. Tony regretted that statutory targets were very narrow and suggested that schools should have a much wider range of targets such as musical instrument or residential experience for all pupils
- Absence Although this might seem a peripheral issue, absence at the beginning of the school year often brought problems for integration into that new school year. Attendance targets were seen as a mixed blessing, giving support to schools combatting truancy but possibly having a bad impact on schools with children with specific difficulties.
- 14 – 19 curriculum. Tony stressed the importance of this major initiative where secondary school governors should be addressing the appropriateness of their future curriculum. The KS3 strategy is becoming embedded and there are some signs in Devon of progress. There is also the prospect of greater collaboration between schools and colleges.
- Inclusion and its costs. Again there were mixed views but an emphasis on the importance of meeting the needs of individual children and the benefit of including all children within our local societies.
- Fears were expressed about the abilities of schools to give financial support to the ideals of the Transformation of the Workforce agenda ... and to come to terms with what is involved in sufficient time.
- A number of delegates expressed their continuing worries about levels of stress in schools amongst both staff and pupils

Tony was thanked most warmly by the Chairman for a fascinating and challenging overview and delegates applauded both his comprehensive and authoritative presentation and his openness in responding to questions. The Chairman assured delegates that the issues raised would be pursued by the Executive. He asked delegates for their view of the meeting and there was a high level of approval for the contributions both from speakers and from the floor. There had been some very helpful ideas for the future.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.00 p.m. precisely.

Ivan Godfrey 20/05/03