

Secretary's Report 2003 - 2004

The County Secretary sought to summarise a very busy year by reference initially to the following papers in the delegates' pack:

- Information about the DAG Website
- Information about the role of DAG including a list of current Executive members and a list of other bodies on which DAG is represented
- Feedback from the DAG Area Meetings held during the Spring Term 2004

He felt that many points would either arise in later discussions or be alluded to in the papers above. He covered some issues from the past year in the written summary in the pack and focussed on others (highlighted in bold in this report). He accepted that there were also omissions!! He stressed that the documents within the pack were for use both by individual delegates and their governing bodies / schools

National issues

- Funding
 - Last year's settlement was bad - but better in Devon than many authorities!
 - This and next year's settlements denied local flexibility but allowed for survival ... just!!
 - Threshold payments and structure continued to cause problems
- Workforce Remodelling
 - A hugely important agenda ... but too much of a wing and a prayer?
 - The LEA local team was now in place to support schools
- Job Evaluation applied to all non-teaching staff within schools and was set to last over a 3-year period
- **National Governors' Council / National Association of Governors & Managers**
Both organisations have continued to thrive and develop as evidenced by materials in the delegates' pack. DAG has maintained strong links with both organisations and valued their support in promoting the cause of governance, speaking on behalf of governors and giving support on individual matters. The organisations have worked well together with different emphases and strengths in their work for governors. In notes he also recorded:
 - The lack, at times, of real consultation with governors by government
 - The development of an NGC Regional Structure that would strengthen our local voice
 - The County Secretary had been co-opted on to NAGM Executive

Local Issues

- **Funding**
The Devon Schools' Forum had been at the forefront of national work. Its work was profiled on the DfES website and its advisory views were listened to carefully by County Councillors. Despite its size (32 members + observers) meetings were clear, positive and extremely well-attended. The members controlled the agenda and the discussions and the 13 governor members played a full role in this work. With this responsibility had come the realisation that it was impossible to please everyone all of the time! Governors were encouraged to contact the Forum about matters of concern with regard to funding.
- **Vision for Learning**
From the outset governors had played a major role in developing the agenda and discussion of this year-long consultation on the future of education within Devon. The County Secretary suggested that individual GBs could take this further by using the materials presented at the Director's Receptions held around the county to hold joint discussion meetings with staff in their schools at the end of which all those who had taken part could then submit their individual views on the available pro forma (contact the Secretary for relevant details).
- The Schools' Support Services Board was
 - Challenging the Service Providers from within the LEA
 - Supporting Schools in the purchasing process
 - Looking at alternative providers who will guarantee quality countywide
 - Supporting the Primary School Healthy Eating Review - tackling an issue of great concern to many
- **DAG Project - Inclusion This had been a new venture by DAG, an attempt to produce something of more permanent tangible value in order to recognise the tenth anniversary of DAG's creation. Governors had been consulted on which issues they most needed assistance and indicated that the issue of Inclusion was foremost. It was planned to produce by September a booklet of good practice case studies of Inclusion work in Devon schools, together with further guidance and cross references**
- DAG had produced newspaper articles to promote the governor role and to find new governors
- **The Joint DGS / DAG Autumn weekend Conference on Extended Schools had proved a great success. The Secretary paid tribute to the work of the DGS team, in particular Jane Lucas, for**

their support in this venture. The report of the conference could be found on the DGS website. A future conference was being planned for late Spring 2005.

- **Good governor / headteacher relations were essential in the well-being of schools. Sadly there were instances where mutual trust and confidence break down and both DGS and DAG needed to be aware of these potential difficulties and to do all they could to support and help from the earliest possible opportunity.**
- DAG work had been much enhanced by the appointment of an Assistant Secretary - Jennie Curry
- DAISI was a continuing success story and there were a number of new DAG members on Board
- Issues raised by members over the past year have included:
 - Funding
 - Workforce Remodelling
 - SEN / Inclusion
 - Quality of some service provision
 - " Parenting! Parenting! Parenting! "

Organisation

- **Communications have remained an absolutely key priority for governors. The accompanying papers highlighted the many ways (Checklist : Devon Governor : E-Mail network : Websites : internal links within Governing Bodies) in which DAG had sought to support GBs over the past year. There was a large amount of information available and DAG sought to direct governors towards those items of specific interest for them. All delegates were encouraged to work their way through the papers in the pack and to make themselves and/or fellow governors aware of the support available.**
- **Area Meetings + Feedback. This had become a regular and valued feature of DAG activities with all parts of the county holding a meeting within the past year. The meetings had provided a two way process, disseminating information but also receiving views and passing them on to our national organisations.**
- This year had seen the establishment of a Crediton branch ... but the apparent demise of the Tavistock and Tiverton branches
- Routine
 - Executive Meetings were held 6 times a year.
 - Executive members had been involved in a number of LEA appointments including that of the new Director.
 - **Representation on Other Bodies and Reports Back. The list in the delegates' pack indicated the broad range of groups to which governors have contributed. The Secretary praised their work but also indicated that DAG was always looking for further volunteers to be involved in this task of providing governor input and sharing feedback on the work of these committees.**

Thanks

The Secretary wished to add his thanks to those of the Chair to all of the following for their support over the past year

- Devon Governor Services
- The LEA and its officers
- Fellow Executive Members
- All fellow governors

Future

In looking to the future the Secretary identified the huge amount of commitment required of governors today. He felt that, although we may complain of this workload, we nonetheless prefer the idea of local control over the work of our schools rather than having to accept decisions from the centre. He also suggested that society may overestimate how much schools could do in creating the adults of tomorrow ... in any 52-week year children spend only approx. 1350 hours in school - that is roughly the equivalent of 8 weeks' non-stop schooling!

Finally he stressed the importance of working together. He felt that all of DAG's work was based upon the premise of sharing ideas and good practice, learning from each other and being prepared to work together for all the children of Devon. He hoped that this approach would be able to continue into the future - indeed, for him it was the only environment in which he felt comfortable in working.