

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 1 February 2024	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.30	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Hybrid

Private pre-meeting

(09.15)

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.30)

2 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – evidence session 9

(09.30 – 10.45)

(Pages 1 – 44)

Sam Rowlands MS, Member in Charge

Dr Dave Harvey, Member of the Senedd Support Staff

Micheal Dauncey, Senedd Researcher

Manon Huws, Legal Services, Senedd

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – Engagement findings

3 Papers to note

(10.45)

3.1 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 45 – 46)



Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Local Government and Housing Committee

3.2 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Page 47)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Health and Social Services

3.3 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 48 – 49)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

3.4 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 50 – 54)

Attached Documents:

Briefing note from the Wales Women’s Budget Group and the Women’s Equality Network (WEN) Wales

3.5 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

(Pages 55 – 60)

Attached Documents:

Letter from Sam Rowlands MS, Member in Charge

3.6 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 61 – 62)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chief Executive of Auditory Verbal UK

3.7 General scrutiny of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

(Pages 63 – 67)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

3.8 General scrutiny of the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

(Pages 68 – 69)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

- 4 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting**
(10.45)

Break

(10.45 – 11.00)

- 5 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – consideration of the evidence and key issues**
(11.00 – 11.45)

- 6 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25 – consideration of the draft report**

(11.45 – 12.10)

(Pages 70 – 127)

Attached Documents:

DRAFT – Budget report

- 7 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare? – consideration of the key issues**

(12.10 – 13.00)

(Pages 128 – 147)

Attached Documents:

Key issues

Agenda Item 2

Document is Restricted

Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Engagement findings

January 2024

As part of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's inquiry into the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill, the Citizen Engagement Team proposed a series of focus groups to gather the views of parents and carers on the proposals. This paper communicates the findings of this engagement.

1. Engagement

1. The Citizen Engagement Team held 2 focus groups and 3 interviews between 6th and 20th December with a number of parents in different areas of Wales. One individual also provided comments via email.
2. The tight timeframe for engagement before the Christmas break resulted in a challenging recruitment exercise, so interviews were offered to those who were unable to attend a scheduled focus group.

Participants

3. During the consultation on the development of the Bill, professionals, individuals and children and young people were given the opportunity to respond to a survey on the proposals. The Senedd's Youth Engagement team also engaged with young people during sessions already arranged at the Senedd.



4. However, only a small number of respondents to the consultation identified as parents/carers. The Citizen Engagement Team therefore focused on gathering the views of parents and carers on the Bill.
5. Participants were sourced through organisations supporting families, and parents and carers in particular. A number of participants from the [Disabled Children's Access](#) inquiry were also asked if they'd like to contribute to this inquiry based on the relevance of the comments they had provided.
6. 20 parents took part in total. 6 participants have children with additional learning needs or a disability and 14 participants are members of a group supporting disadvantaged diverse ethnic communities.
7. Participants contributed from 6 local authority areas across north and south Wales.
8. The Citizen Engagement Team would like to thank all those who contributed to the programme of engagement.

Methodology

9. The Citizen Engagement Team's work touched on the following terms of reference for the inquiry:
 - *The general principles of the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation to deliver the stated policy intention;*
 - *Whether there are any unintended consequences arising from the Bill;*
 - *Any potential barriers to the implementation of the Bill's provisions and whether the Bill and accompanying Explanatory Memorandum and Regularly Impact Assessment takes account of them (including commencement and the United Kingdom Internal Market Act);*

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. How important is residential outdoor education to children and young people's development?
2. What are the main benefits to children and young people from experiencing an outdoor education residential?

3. What are the main barriers to children and young people attending a residential outdoor education visit?
 4. Should children and young people have the opportunity to undertake an outdoor education residential and, if so, should it be free of charge to all?
 5. If residential outdoor education was free for all children, is there anything else that would prevent you from sending your child on the visit? For example, the cost of clothing or footwear.
 6. Consultations on the draft Bill found that after financial constraints, the biggest barriers to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education is both children's and parent's anxiety and uncertainty. Is this something that you'd agree with? If so, could you elaborate on your concerns and is there anything that could be done to alleviate them?
 7. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?
- 10.** The format of engagement was largely comparable across the interviews and focus groups, but varied slightly to respond to the views, experiences and ideas shared by contributors.

2. Engagement findings: importance of residential outdoor education to children and young people's development

Positive

- 11.** Overall, participants agreed that the opportunity of residential outdoor education would contribute positively to children and young people's development.

"I do think it's a really good thing for children, I think it's really positive."

Disability

- 12.** A number of participants felt that the opportunity was even more important for those with additional needs or disabilities, as they are perhaps limited in their opportunities in comparison to other children and young people.

"More so, I would say for children with special needs and the reason...they already have limited access to the world."

"The opportunities are really not there when you look at how much a disabled child loses out in comparison to a neurotypical child."

Cultural differences

- 13.** Participants in one group felt that going on trips would offer benefits but they also valued travel opportunities as a family and that *"family time"* was highly important to them culturally.
- 14.** As a result, most participants in this group appeared to favour being able to travel more as a family that sending their children on school residentials and one participant talked about a scheme in Amsterdam where the government give the family €500 to go on a trip together over the summer.

3. Engagement findings: main benefits to children and young people from experiencing an outdoor education residential

Independence

- 15.** All participants talked about the benefits of developing some independence during an outdoor education residential and *"learning how to be away from home"*.
- 16.** Participants felt it could be a good opportunity to help children learn life skills and being *"out of their comfort zone"* would give the children independence.

"In school you are just with people you're familiar with, which is great for continuity. But my child has got learn to survive in this world as well."

Social skills

- 17.** Most participants talked about the benefit of the opportunity to socialise outside of school and that this can support developing relationships.
- 18.** One participant talked about the benefits to children's social development from the opportunity to *"experience things other than the everyday at school and at home"*.
- 19.** A number of participants said that this type of trip was one of the only opportunities disabled children get to be away from their parents and mix with their peers.

"My son came home and he'd made a friend and he got invited to tea, and he's still friends with him now, 6 years later. And that person's become a real advocate for him."

Nature

- 20.** One participant talked about the importance of helping to develop an interest for the outdoors and to nurture a generation who are committed to preserving it.
- 21.** She talked about developing young people who *"are at one with nature"* and giving the opportunity to develop survival skills.

Mental health

- 22.** One participant talked about the benefits of a trip like this to children’s mental health. She felt that being given the opportunity to be outside and encouraging more activity like this, could support positive mental health for young people.

4. Engagement findings: main barriers to children and young people attending a residential outdoor education visit

Costs

23. Participants felt the costs of residential trips were currently a barrier to most families, especially for those with more than one child. Most participants therefore supported the Bill's proposals that costs would be covered.

"I do think the cost is a massive, massive thing for people."

"Twins – well they are double the cost."

Accessibility

24. Participants felt there was a need to ensure the chosen facility would cater for any disabilities or additional needs and that planning and communication with parents was key. It was felt that many sites used currently are not fully accessible.

"They've got to assess the place properly and they've got to co-produce it with parents."

"There really needs to be somewhere in this act that says that schools have to choose places that have enough choice and options and do not segregate on ability."

25. Further to that point, it was noted that the activities themselves should also be accessible, not just the facility itself.

"...for most children, they would want to participate in some way, and I think it's awful for them to just sit there and want to be part of it and not able to."

26. One participant made the point that her child's school had worked with a disabled charity who make sure the activities are inclusive. So although not all the children attending the trip were disabled, the charity were able to cater for everyone from the start, instead of working out what additional support was needed for some of the group.

Sufficient support

27. Ratios of teachers or TAs to children were seen as a barrier as more would be needed when considering disabled children in the group. It was felt that the opportunities would need to be sufficiently financed in order to overcome these barriers.

28. Another participant suggested creating a pool of assistants locally to be used as a source of support, based in the local authority perhaps. As there was recognition that it was already hard on the school with so many children to look after.

"I wouldn't want to put any extra pressure on the on the school."

29. Some parents of disabled children were being approached to accompany their children to make sure their needs could be met. Participants felt this wasn't a fair opportunity as learners should be offered the chance to be away from parents, like their peers, in order to be offered an equal opportunity. They again felt that this came down to costs and sufficiently staffing the visit.

"Parents of children should not solve the support need as going away on a residential on equal basis would mean that all the other children would have their parents in tow – part of the experience is that parent free time!"

30. Further to this, one participant raised the barriers they had experienced from the teachers and the school in their understanding of equality. They felt the school had discriminated against their child in not fully providing the opportunity to attend a residential.

"One of the biggest barriers is teachers and schools and understanding about equality and equity. It took me a long time to get over it and that's what they don't realise. The discrimination really hurts."

Cultural sensitivities

31. Many participants felt that residential would need to be culturally sensitive. This would include planning for the correct food and designing appropriate activities.

"I sent my son on a trip recently and he had nothing to eat because there was no halal meat and he was only offered vegetables and he wouldn't eat them."

32. Some participants were concerned about the management of behaviour.

33. They also felt that it was important to ensure routine was upheld.

34. A number of participants expressed concerns about *"girls and boys mixing"*.

Lenth of residential

35. One member of the group felt the length of time could become a barrier. For example, should a trip last the full 4 nights and 5 days, it is likely her child would not last the full trip and they'd then be seen as different to the other children.

5. Engagement findings: the opportunity to undertake an outdoor education residential and whether it should be free of charge to all

Agreement

36. The majority of participants were in agreement that young people should have the opportunity to attend and that it should be free to all. A small group of participants said they supported the idea, should the barriers discussed during their session be addressed.

Against

37. One participant was completely against the proposal.

Opportunities for those with disabilities

38. Some participants felt strongly that children should have the opportunity to undertake a residential like this, and more so for those children with disabilities.

39. A number of participants felt that legislation could help ensure their children were offered the same opportunities as the rest of their peers, as long as there was guidance to support schools and providers in how to present these opportunities.

"For me it's about my disabled son, who doesn't have access to the typical stuff that other children do, so this opportunity should come as priority to those who don't have your breakfast club, after school club and extracurricular activities due to his disability....I think it's more of a priority than my daughter."

"They deserve to have as much fun as anyone else."

"There needs to be no excuses for inclusion and fully supported with time to plan for and resources to enable good coproduction with families."

"The social model of disability needs to be written into this law, as does the UNCRDP."

6. Engagement findings: additional barriers to sending children on an outdoor education residential

Participants were asked if residential outdoor education was free for all children, is there anything else that would prevent you from sending your child on the visit? For example, the cost of clothing or footwear.

Additional costs

40. Participants felt there needed to be careful consideration of what exactly is covered in terms of costs, as additional items could mean some families would still be unable to go.

"They need to be really conscious about what their expectations are of parents, because even though they're saying it's free, if they're expecting so much from parents for them to provide, it's not realistic for some."

"I worry about the true costs."

41. Equally, some appreciated that additional costs could be a barrier, but felt that the overall benefits outweighed the barriers.

"So getting extra boots and things like that, it's minimal in the scheme of things as to what your child will benefit from during this opportunity."

"We can't expect too much of the government."

42. A number of participants made suggestions to address these additional costs. For example, that equipment such as sleeping bags could be bought and used on rotation if the trips were staggered, in order to alleviate the costs to the families.

43. Another suggestion was that additional costs could be income based or that direct payments could be used to help fund the additional support some young people might need to ensure it was fully inclusive.

7. Engagement findings: anxiety and uncertainty

Consultations on the draft Bill found that after financial constraints, the biggest barriers to children and young people accessing residential outdoor education is both children's and parent's anxiety and uncertainty. Participants were asked if this was something they agreed with, and if so, what were their concerns and suggestions to alleviate them.

Anxiety

44. Several participants said they felt they would be anxious if their children were away from them for several nights:

"I wouldn't be able to sleep if they were away overnight."

"I would struggle to let them go as we are always as a family. We go on trips but we go together as a family."

45. Some participants expressed that they think their children may initially be anxious but *"once they are there, I doubt they would miss us! But they might need support to be happy to go away overnight."*

Confidence in the opportunity

46. The majority of participants agreed that both young people and parents could feel anxious about a trip like this. However, most felt that with confidence in the school and with trusted people involved in the planning, the benefits outweighed any potential anxiety.

47. Participants agreed that there was heightened anxiety for parents of disabled children or those with additional needs as they needed to be assured their children would be given the care they need.

48. One participant had really positive experiences with 3 of her children attending residentials and it had come down to good communication with the school before and during the trip.

49. Another participant's child has been at the school since he was 3 and so she feels they have a good understanding of his needs and what would need to be put in place for a trip like this. She therefore felt anxiety wouldn't be a big issue and the confidence she had in the

school and the understanding they have for her child's needs meant she was very comfortable with the prospect of a residential trip.

"What helped was having lots of meetings like from the school like that needs to be put in that parents are fully aware of what is going on."

50. Many participants felt if the confidence for the family as a whole was lifted, anxiety wouldn't be such a barrier.

"My school wouldn't allow our kids to have their phones, which actually raised our anxiety through the roof because, unless they were putting something on Twitter, we had no idea what our kids were doing."

"Our children don't get the same opportunities to go away from the family, as the parents can be afraid of taking the step of letting them go away – parents need knowledge and information to make them feel reassured."

"My daughter is 15 and she's never had a night away from me. There's not enough information to give parents the confidence of letting their children go away overnight."

51. Another participant said a risk assessment beforehand for their child would have been helpful, and knowing what the school would do in certain scenarios.

52. One participant's son had recently attended an overnight trip where he hadn't eaten or drunk anything. Although it was a short trip, this had of course caused some anxiety and had this been a longer trip, would have been a big problem. She felt that having more support staff would have helped with this anxiety. She will also be having a meeting with the school the next time he goes away to make sure the necessary things are put in place to support him.

"I feel comfortable with the school, but I think there is still further work to be done."

"I just think it's a shame that you have to have that extra stress on you as a parent when you're already worried about them going anyway."

53. One participant felt if there was a cultural connection this would really help to support the families.

Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

25 January 2024

Dear Jayne

Draft Budget 2024-25

You will be aware that on 18 January 2024 we held an evidence session with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) as part of our scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2024-25. The WLGA representatives were clear that at a time of intense budgetary pressures, cuts to education services are inevitable. We would like to draw your attention to several specific issues of concern which were raised during the session, as they may be relevant for your own scrutiny purposes:

- cuts to school budgets and the potential consequences, including support for those with additional learning needs;
- lack of clarity around pension arrangements for teachers, and whether the Welsh Government will be funding them;
- a complexity of needs in schools as a result of the COVID pandemic, leading to cost pressures of additional facilities and resources which can only be part-funded;
- the need to prioritise safeguarding over early intervention and prevention; and
- the number of schools predicting "irretrievable" budget deficits.

Further information on the discussions are available in the Committee's [transcript](#).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The letters are cursive and connected, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Griffiths MS

Chair Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 3.2



Eluned Morgan AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant MS
Children, Young People and Education Committee

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

23 January 2024

Dear Jayne

Following the Children, Young People and Education committee's draft budget scrutiny session on 11 January, I am writing to provide you with a few corrections to the transcript of the session.

I'd like to add the following correction to the transcript for my contribution at paragraph 164:

Whilst the percentage increase in Speech and Language Therapist training places was correct at 'about 11%' (actual figure 11.4%) this should not have been attributed to the last year. This figure relates to the percentage increase in Speech and Language Therapist training places since 2018.

Additionally, at paragraph 8 of the transcript, I used terminology that indicated that children's services were 'ring-fenced' within the planning framework. This was picked up by yourself in a summary at paragraph 166 and has led to a specific action following the meeting, as follows:

The Minister for Health and Social Services agreed to provide further information on how the NHS planning framework supports ring-fencing of funding for children and young people.

To clarify, allocations for children and young people are not ring-fenced from a funding perspective. I was aiming to convey that there are specific expectations within the planning framework that relate to quality and equity of services and how they impact on children's services. I am keen to see evidence of the approaches being taking across these areas set out in the narrative of the three-year plans.

Yours sincerely,

Eluned Morgan AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Agenda Item 3.3

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/JMEWL/3106/23

Jayne Bryant MS
Chair of Children, Young People and Education
Committee Welsh Parliament

23 January 2024

Dear Jayne

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the draft budget 2024-25 proposals for the Education and Welsh Language Main Expenditure Group at our evidence session on 17 January. Please find enclosed the further information on two actions to inform your ongoing budget scrutiny.

Breakdown of resource reductions 2023-24

Annex A provides a breakdown by Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) of the resource reductions totalling £74.7m announced by the Minister for Finance and Local Government on 17 October 2023, which will be formalised as part of the Second Supplementary Budget 2023-24 on 20 February. As I confirmed to the Committee, the savings have been identified through a review of uncommitted expenditure and a re-profiling of demand led budgets.

Degree apprenticeships

As the Committee is aware, I share the responsibility for degree apprenticeships with the Minister for Economy and I am working with him to support the delivery and planning for the apprenticeship budget. Apprenticeship delivery will be managed by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research from 1 April. Whilst the amount of funding that will be ringfenced for degree apprenticeships cannot be confirmed at this stage, I can confirm the appropriate budget will be transferred from the Economy MEG in the supplementary budget for 2024-25.

I will provide a response on the two remaining actions from our evidence session once notified.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Miles AS/MS

Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Annex A – Breakdown of £74.7m resource reductions for 2023-24

BEL Name	2023-24 Reprioritisation to Reserves £000
Curriculum & Assessment	-489
Teacher Development & Support	-2,340
Qualifications Wales	0
Post-16 Provision	-8,498
International Learning Exchange Programme	0
Commission for Tertiary Education & Research	-200
HEFCW Programme Expenditure	-670
School Improvement Grant	-2,155
School Standards Support	0
Tackling Barriers to Attainment	0
Supporting Digital Learning in Education	-450
Additional Learning Needs	0
Food & Nutrition in Schools	-12,340
Post 16 Specialist Placements	0
Whole School Approach to Wellbeing	-1,630
Vulnerable Groups	-200
Student Support Grants ¹	-44,636
SLC/HMRC Admin	0
Tackling Disaffection	0
Community Schools	-270
Offender Learning	0
Youth Engagement & Employment	-850
Education Communications	0
International Education Programme	0
Welsh in Education	0
Welsh Language	0
Welsh Language Commissioner	0
Education Infrastructure	0
Total	-74,728

¹ The full reduction to this BEL to be formalised in the Second Supplementary Budget 2023-24 is £53.4m, of which £44.6m is being returned to reserves with the balance of £8.8m utilised within the OGD.

Agenda Item 3.4



Briefing: Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25

January 2024

Introduction

The Wales Women's Budget Group and the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales have jointly analysed the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25 from a gender equality perspective. This briefing highlights some key points and recommendations. Further detail and background information can be found in our [joint written response](#), which was produced prior to the publication of the draft budget.

1. Childcare

While we welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to protect frontline services in the 2024-25 Draft Budget, we are extremely disappointed that childcare is not included amongst the services to be protected. We are particularly alarmed that alongside this omission, childcare funding in Wales is being cut. In addition to the £16million of cuts announced in the Welsh Government's in-year spending changes in October 2023, last month's Draft Budget included a further £11.2million of cuts to childcare.

- 1.1. In both cases, cuts to the childcare budget have been justified on the basis of lower-than-expected uptake forecasts of the Welsh Childcare Offer. It is well-evidenced that the need for affordable and accessible childcare remains critical in Wales, as high childcare costs are compounding financial pressures and pushing families into debt and poverty. A recent report published by Oxfam Cymru highlighted that 43% of parents and guardians in Wales have not been able to pay other essential costs after paying for childcare, and that over two-thirds had to reduce their working hours due to a lack of childcare.¹ These pressures are being felt most acutely by single parents – 86% of whom are women – who face the highest risk of relative income poverty in Wales.²
- 1.2. As rising costs of childcare continue to push women into unemployment and their families into poverty, lower-than-expected uptake forecasts are likely indicative of a mismatch between what families need and what is available through the Offer. There are several possible reasons for this, for example, the Offer is only available to parents of three and four-year-olds, and its eligibility criteria excludes families on the lowest incomes. There are also significant gaps in provisions for parents working atypical hours, for disabled children and for those living in rural areas.
- 1.3. In this context, the Welsh Government's decision to reprioritise childcare funding, instead of using it to accelerate work towards ensuring childcare is available to those who need it most, is highly regrettable. We would urge the Welsh Government to thoroughly investigate the reasons for lower uptake levels and consider whether any aspect of the design or operation of the Offer prevents families who would benefit most from funded childcare from accessing it. These issues should be tackled and resolved before any financial reprioritizations or cuts are made to the childcare budget.

¹ Oxfam Cymru (2023), Little steps, big struggles: Childcare in Wales
<https://oxfamapps.org/cymru/wpcontent/uploads/2023/11/Little-Steps-Big-Struggles.pdf>

² WEN Wales (2023), Make Care Fair Briefing: <https://wenwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Make-Care-Fair-WenWales.3.pdf>

Recommendations:

- (1) The Welsh Government should refrain from making any cuts to the childcare budget until the reasons for lower uptake levels of the Childcare Offer are fully understood.
- (2) If this analysis identifies any aspects of the design or operation of the Childcare Offer that prevents parents from accessing it, any savings from lower forecast demand should be put toward resolving these issues, starting with those that would have the biggest impact on families on the lowest incomes.

2. Public Services

Rising costs have put unprecedented pressure on Wales' public services, endangering their quality of provision and ability to meet demand. This will disproportionately impact women, who are more likely to work in public services, to rely on public services and to become providers of last resort when services are cut.³ While we welcome the Welsh Government's commitment to protect frontline public services in its in-year spending changes and in the 2024-25 Draft Budget, we are concerned that the allocated funding is not sufficient to keep pace with the cost pressures. We are particularly concerned that the public services most critical to women, such as social care, childcare, and housing, will face real-term and actual funding cuts as a result.

2.1. Local Government: Local authorities in Wales provide many of the vital public services that women use and need, including childcare, social care, and housing support. As noted by Wales Fiscal Analysis, Wales' local authorities are facing a £354million shortfall in 2024-2025⁴, which will require difficult decisions regarding service provision cuts. To avoid exacerbating gender inequality, these decisions must be informed by robust equalities evaluation and impact assessment using gender disaggregated data to understand their impact on women in Wales. These evaluations should be reported to and monitored by the Welsh Government who must take necessary action to mitigate any inequitable impacts. By embedding gender budgeting into their budgetary processes, both the Welsh Government and local authorities can ensure that their spending decisions and cuts are not disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable in society. The Gender Equality Review, *Deeds Not Words* (2019) provides a clear, well-evidenced framework through which to do this.⁵ The Welsh Government should expediate the full implementation of the review recommendations as a matter of urgency. The Wales Women's Budget Group would be pleased to work with officials in progressing this important piece of work.

2.2. Council Tax: In the absence of additional funding, local authorities in Wales are likely to resort to council tax rises to meet cost pressures. As council tax is not based on income, it can have inequitable effects on low-earning tenants and homeowners, especially in the context of other cost pressures. Rises in regressive council taxes are therefore likely to disproportionately impact single parents in Wales – 86% of whom are women⁶ – who

³ UK Women's Budget Group (2022), The gendered impact of the cost-of-living crisis on public services <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Gendered-impact-of-cost-of-living-crisis-on-public-services1.pdf>.

⁴ Wales Fiscal Analysis (2023), The medium-term fiscal outlook for local government in Wales, https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2779342/The-medium-term-fiscal-outlook-for-local.pdf

⁵ Chwarae Teg (2019), *Deeds Not Words, Review of Gender Equality in Wales*.

⁶ Oxfam Cymru (2023), *Little steps, big struggles: Childcare in Wales*.

rely on a single income. To mitigate these inequitable impacts, the Welsh Government must accelerate its current work to establish a more fair and progressive council tax system in Wales.

Recommendations

- (1) Funding cuts to public services must be informed by robust equalities evaluation and impact assessment using gender disaggregated data to understand their impact on women in Wales. The Welsh Government should monitor these impacts and take necessary action to mitigate any inequitable consequences.
- (2) To avoid further entrenching gender inequality through spending decisions, the Welsh Government should progress the full implementation of the Gender Equality Review and roll out gender budgeting approaches across Government.
- (3) The Welsh Government should accelerate its ongoing work to establish a more fair and progressive council tax system in Wales as a matter of urgency.

3. Cost of Living Support

The Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing cost of living crisis have not impacted all households in Wales equally. Due to deep-rooted gender inequality and a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities, women in Wales – particularly ethnic minority, racialised, disabled women and single mothers – occupy an unequal position in the Welsh economy and are being hit hardest by the impacts of the crisis. In this context, we are concerned that government support measures do not go far enough to protect women from falling deeper into debt and poverty.

3.1. Hardship Payments: Support measures such as the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF), are welcome interventions which can help to reduce pressure on women's incomes as the costs of essentials remain high. We therefore welcome the Welsh Government's continued funding of the DAF in the 2024-25 Draft Budget. However, a lack of gender disaggregated data and analysis makes it difficult to ascertain the impact of this support on women in Wales. The Welsh Government should produce a disaggregated DAF analysis to better understand the demographics of those accessing the fund.

3.1.1. From a gendered perspective, the fact that hardship payments are made at household level can undermine women's access to an independent income and increases the opportunities for financial abuse and financial dependency on an abuser.⁷ The Welsh Government should therefore consider splitting DAF payments for households with more than one individual.

3.2. Winter Fuel Support Scheme: In the context of rising energy costs and colder weather, current levels of governmental fuel support are insufficient. While some emergency support is available through the Fuel Bank Foundation, this does not go far enough to protect the numerous households in Wales facing fuel poverty this Winter. To do so, the Welsh Government must progress the implementation of the delayed Warm Homes Programme as a matter of urgency.

3.3. Long-term measures: While hardship payments and support schemes are essential, they are short-term measures that do little to address the underlying causes of the crisis and help households cope in the longer term. It is therefore vital that these measures go

⁷ Chwarae Teg (2019), *Trapped: Poverty amongst Women in Wales today*.

hand in hand with the longer-term work to tackle the structural causes of poverty and inequality in Wales. This should include full implementation of the recommendations of the Gender Equality Review, including gender budgeting.

Recommendations:

- (1) The Welsh Government should provide a breakdown of the Discretionary Assistance Fund analysis by gender and other protected characteristics.
- (2) The Welsh Government should consider splitting DAF payments for households with more than one individual to safeguard women's access to hardship payments.
- (3) The Welsh Government should progress the implementation of the Warm Homes Programme without further delay.
- (4) The Welsh Government should tackle gender inequality at its root by progressing the full implementation of the Gender Equality Review recommendations as a matter of urgency.

4. Gender Budgeting

In the current context of unprecedented budgetary pressures, gender budgeting remains a key tool at the Welsh Government's disposal to both safeguard and advance equality in Wales. It provides the tools to restructure spending decisions by taking account of their gendered impacts and redistributing resources in a way that eliminates inequitable outcomes. We welcome the Welsh Government's commitment and ongoing work to implement gender budgeting but are concerned that the pace of progress remains slow.

4.1. Gender Budgeting Pilots: Each of the Welsh Government's gender budgeting pilots – Personal Learning Accounts, Young Persons Guarantee and E-Move – were scheduled to conclude by 2022-23. After some delay, the external evaluation of the Personal Learning Accounts pilot was published in June 2023. The evaluation identified several important learnings and recommendations on how to apply gender budgeting in a practical context, including the timing of the implementation and building up staff expertise. However, it remains unclear if and how these findings were used to inform the development of the other two pilots and how the implementation of gender budgeting has been refined throughout.

- 4.1.1. To prevent pilots becoming siloed and to ensure steady progress towards the wider rollout of gender budgeting, information on progress throughout the pilots must be clarified without delay. It can then be used to inform plans for mainstreaming gender budgeting across the Welsh Government, in order support better policymaking and budget allocation. The Wales Women's Budget Group would be pleased to work with officials to progress this important piece of work.

Recommendations

- (1) The Welsh Government should provide without delay a progress update on the Young Persons Guarantee and E-Move gender budgeting pilots, and, if the pilots have concluded, publish their evaluations. This information should then be used to developing plans to mainstream gender budgeting tools across the Welsh Government.

5. Social Justice and Third Sector Funding

5.1. Precarity of the Welsh third sector: Third sector organisations in Wales play an indispensable role in scrutinising policies and advocating for the most disadvantaged in our society. The Welsh third sector is facing unprecedented challenges due to the loss of

EU funding and rising costs pressures. Recent research published by the Wales Council of Voluntary Action showed that 43% of the over 300 organisations surveyed had to actively reduce staff numbers.⁸ The impact on the women's sector is especially severe, as it is already seriously underfunded. Research by the Rosa Foundation showed that only 1.8% of the total grants awarded to charities in the UK in 2021 went to women and girls focused activity.⁹ The incredibly sad loss of Chwarae Teg is symptomatic of these pressures and representative of an alarming loss of capacity and expertise in the Welsh third sector, whose workforce is predominantly female.

5.2. Equalities, Inclusion and Human Rights: In this context, the Welsh Government's decision to rationalise funding for Equalities, Inclusion and Human budget within the draft budget is deeply concerning.

5.2.1. This decision follows an in-year spending change to cut the Social Justice budget by £7million. Despite making up just 13% of the total Social Justice Budget, 60% (£4.2 million) of these savings fall under the Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights expenditure group, which funds a number of important equality and human rights programmes and third sector organisations in Wales. Since the announcement in October 2023, it remains unclear which particular programmes will be postponed or downgraded as part of this savings exercise. To facilitate proper scrutiny of these impacts, the Welsh Government must clarify the details of the in-year re-prioritisation without delay.

5.2.2. The cuts to the Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights budget come at a time when we need to be especially vigilant about protecting equality and human rights. To prevent further loss of expertise, safeguard the delivery of long-term equality and human rights objectives, and protect disadvantaged groups, the Welsh Government should take urgent action to protect the sustainability of a rapidly contracting third sector in Wales.

Recommendations

- (1) The Welsh Government should clarify without delay what programmes will be affected by the in-year spending change to the Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights.
- (2) The Welsh Government should take urgent action to protect the sustainability of the third sector in Wales to prevent further loss of expertise, safeguard the delivery of long-term equality and human rights objectives, and protect disadvantaged groups.

For more information please contact:

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⁸ WCVA (2023), The Aftermath of an afterthought, <https://wcva.cymru/views/the-aftermath-of-an-afterthought/>

⁹ Rosa (2023), Mapping the UK Women and Girls Sector and its Funding: Where Does the Money Go? <https://rosauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Women-and-Girls-Sector-Research-Mapping-ReportAmended.pdf>

Agenda Item 3.5

Sam Rowlands

Member of the Welsh Parliament for
North Wales

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Jayne Bryant
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru

23 January 2024

Dear Jayne,

Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

I am writing with regard to the recent written evidence paper that was provided to the Committee by the Minister for Education and Welsh Language.

It is worth noting at the outset that I fully respect the Minister's entitlement to have a view on the Bill, and the purpose of me writing today is not to question the Minister's overall position on the Bill. However, I have read the Minister's paper in detail and there are, I believe, some factual inaccuracies or misrepresentations of what the intention of the Bill is and what it does.

I thought it would therefore be helpful to write to the Committee ahead of the session with the Minister to help clarify some of those issues, and to hopefully help the scrutiny process. I am, of course, attending CYPE Committee myself on 1 February, and would be happy to explore these areas further at that time.

The need for legislation

Consideration of whether the Bill is required to deliver its stated aims is a vital piece of the scrutiny process. Unfortunately, the Minister's assertions on whether there is a need for the Bill seems to miss the core aim of the Bill, which is to make the provision of residential outdoor education a statutory requirement.

The Minister states that ‘The Bill is unnecessary as schools already have the legal powers to provide residential outdoor education if they wish’. However, the Minister also concedes in the paper that ‘It is a matter for schools as to whether they chose to provide residential outdoor education (ROE) or not. There is nothing in legislation that prevents or requires it’.

As clearly set out in the Explanatory Memorandum (EM) that accompanies the Bill, the intention of the Bill is to move ROE away from being an enrichment to the curriculum, which is often viewed as a ‘nice to have’, to being an entitlement of the education offer. The effect of the Bill is to make ROE part of the curriculum and whether primary legislation is needed must focus on this, but this does not seem to be reflected in the Minister’s paper.

Furthermore, during the Minister’s oral evidence session with the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee on 22 January, a specific question was asked on whether the legislation was required. The Minister’s response was unclear. At the outset of the meeting he indicated that making ROE itself compulsory could be done using existing regulation making powers, whereas making it compulsory to offer the opportunity would require legislation. At the conclusion of the meeting, when asked if he believed there is a non-statutory means of delivering the objectives of the Member in charge, he stated “not on the compulsory side of things”. There appears to be a contradiction during the course of the Minister’s evidence in Committee and a lack of consistency with what is included in the evidence paper to CYPE Committee.

As this is such a fundamental question, it is vital that there is clarity on the Minister’s position here.

The Minister’s paper also questions the Bill’s approach as to whether pupils will be compelled to attend ROE. I know that there was some discussion of this in the LJC Committee regarding whether the Bill’s purpose is to require that an offer of ROE is made to pupils or to make it a requirement of the Curriculum for Wales. The Bill does both. Pupils will be entitled to ROE and schools must provide it as part of the curriculum. However, the Bill requires that the guidance the Welsh Government issues must provide that it is not compulsory for pupils to attend ROE, for example if they really do not want to do so or it is not in their best interests.

Section 42 of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 and the associated regulations also assist in this area. I appreciate that the Minister referred to this as a “blunt instrument” so it may assist the Committee to have further information as to why the Minister makes this assessment of his own regulation making power. I

realise that cumulatively this provides pupils with a right to opt out from that aspect of the Curriculum for Wales and that may have caused some confusion but I believe the legal effect of this is clear.

Placing a statutory duty on local authorities or the Minister?

The Minister's paper, on several occasions, states that the intention of the Bill was to place a statutory duty on **local authorities** to ensure that young people receiving maintained education are provided with the opportunity to experience ROE. The paper states that because the Bill doesn't place any duties on local authorities (and instead places them on Welsh Ministers) it does not meet the purpose as set out in the EM.

I am particularly concerned that in making this assertion, the Minister has clearly based his thinking on the information contained in the original explanatory memorandum tabled at the start of the process (August 2022) and not on the Bill or the detailed Explanatory Memorandum introduced by me on 24 November 2023. At paragraph 6.3 of his paper, the Minister quotes from paragraph 3 of the EM upon introduction, which describes what my proposal was at the time of the 'leave to proceed' debate in October 2022. Upon reading the EM further, however, it would have been apparent that this changed as the Bill was developed, as I explain below.

When I entered the Ballot, my proposal had intended that the duties would be placed on local authorities. However, during the development of the Bill, and in designing the best method to deliver the main policy objectives, it was decided that the Bill should instead place a duty on the Welsh Ministers to **'ensure pupils in maintained schools are provided with residential outdoor education'** rather than on local authorities directly.

This change in how the policy objectives would be delivered is explained in the detailed EM that accompanies the Bill (see para 8 and para 117 as examples of where this is mentioned). In particular, footnote 140 on page 58 specifically explains the change in thinking. Footnote 140 states:

"Whilst not directly resulting from the consultation, a significant change to the proposals consulted is that the Bill places the duty on the Welsh Ministers to ensure pupils in maintained schools are provided with residential outdoor education rather than on local authorities as was originally set out in the consultation document. This was due to the level of detail that will need to be considered for the Bill's implementation."

Another concern is that paragraph 6.9 of the Minister's paper states that it is not appropriate to place a duty on the Welsh Ministers to provide residential outdoor education. Again, I believe this misreads / misrepresents the intention of the Bill, which actually places a duty on Welsh Ministers to **ensure it is provided**, not to provide it themselves. However, in paragraph 6.14 of the Minister's paper, there does seem to be an acknowledgement that the intention is for the Welsh Ministers to use their powers to facilitate other bodies to deliver ROE.

It is disappointing that the Minister does not seem to understand the important change in how the policy objectives are being delivered through the Bill (i.e. the deliberate intention to not place duties directly on local authorities). It is also concerning that the Minister has read the Bill as placing a duty on Welsh Ministers to deliver ROE, which it clearly does not do. To be clear, when the Welsh Ministers carry out their duty under the Bill, ROE would be included on the curriculum so at that point there would be a duty upon schools to provide ROE as part of the curriculum.

Effectiveness of the Bill

The Minister's paper makes a clear statement that the Bill is drafted in such a way that its legal effect is defective, but does not give any clear explanation as to why that is the case. If there are areas of the Bill that the Minister considers to be defective, it would be better for that to be clearly explained, so that those areas can be considered during the scrutiny process.

The paper also states that the amendments the Bill seeks to make to the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 are not appropriate as they do not fit with the legislative scheme or the principles of that Act. Again, there is no explanation of why that is considered to be the case.

Guidance making powers

The Minister states that he does not consider it appropriate to use the same guidance making power which is used to issue discretionary guidance on the Curriculum for Wales (section 71 of that Act) to put a duty on the Welsh Ministers to issue guidance on Residential Outdoor Education.

In drafting the Bill, this has been considered and my understanding is that there is no legal difficulty with the Bill including a power to issue guidance on some matters (i.e. Welsh Ministers may issue guidance), and a duty to issue guidance on other matters (i.e. Welsh Ministers must issue guidance). This is not an inconsistent approach, it is simply taking a different approach for different things.

As an additional point, paragraph 6.25 of the Minister's paper makes reference to the "4-day requirement" in the context of guidance. A previous draft of the Bill that was published for consultation included reference to the course of ROE being comprised of at least 4 nights and 5 days in guidance. However, the Bill as introduced makes the duration clear on the face of the Bill and does not refer to it as part of the guidance. I am particularly concerned that in making this reference, the Minister has clearly based his thinking on a previous draft of the Bill and not the Bill as introduced.

Finance

The paper from the Minister states that the Bill will add to the financial burden on schools and local authorities. What the paper seems to omit is that one of the key aims of the Bill, as set out in Section 2, is to provide for the Welsh Ministers to pay local authorities an amount sufficient to enable the functions relating to ROE to be carried out. The intention, therefore, is that there should not be any additional financial burden on schools or local authorities.

I fully acknowledge that there may be additional costs to be met from the Welsh Government budget. The Minister has raised this in the Plenary statement following the Bill's introduction on 29 November, in LJC Committee on 22 January, and in the written paper to CYPE Committee. The Minister has continually asserted that any additional costs arising from the Bill, would need to be taken from the existing Education and Welsh Language portfolio budget.

The Bill itself, while requiring Welsh Ministers to pay local authorities a sufficient amount, does not require that to come directly through the Education and Welsh Language portfolio budget. The absolute intention of the Bill is that there should be no cut to existing education budgets, as I fully appreciate the importance of maintaining those budgets to meet the current priorities.

There are other matters raised in the Minister's paper that I do not necessarily agree with, and would be happy to explore those further with the Committee. What I have set out above are, I believe, more crucial to the Committee's scrutiny, and I hope some of the clarification I have provided will help that scrutiny.

Yours sincerely



Sam Rowlands MS

Member of the Welsh Parliament for North Wales

Copied to:

Huw Irranca-Davies, Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

Peredur Owen Griffiths, Chair of the Finance Committee





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Jayne Bryant MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
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25th January 2024

Re. Improving outcomes for deaf babies and children: provision of Auditory Verbal therapy

Dear Ms Bryant,

I am writing to you following our meeting on 15th January 2024 to thank you once again for your support for improving outcomes for deaf children. As you are aware, Auditory Verbal (AV) therapy is a highly specialist, evidence-based, early intervention approach which is transforming opportunities for deaf children in Wales whose families want them to learn to listen and speak. I wanted to share with you some further detail on the significant, long-term savings and clear health and social benefits achievable with this approach and ask whether the Children, Young People and Education Committee will formally consider this important issue.

As Chair of the Committee, I know that you appreciate the value of early intervention programmes in providing improved health, educational and social outcomes for children and the economic value of effective early intervention programmes which save vital resources through improved outcomes. We understand that AV therapy is being included in the new guidance for supporting deaf children that is currently being finalised. However, we were disappointed to see that there was no funding for its provision in the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024-25 and there is an urgent need to invest in the training of the current workforce.

Working together to transform lives

With deaf children in Wales currently falling behind their hearing peers and at risk of lower academic achievement, lower employment prospects and higher risk of social exclusion, bullying and poor mental health, there has never been a more important time to invest in effective and early support to tackle the root cause of disadvantage.

There are around 270 deaf children under 5 in Wales. However, deaf children are not reaching their full potential and we are not currently maximising the investment being made in screening and technology. But it does not have to be this way. When deaf children have access to early and effective support, following early diagnosis and access to technology, outcomes are transformed. Early and effective support should be available for all deaf children whether their families choose to communicate with spoken language, sign language or both.

For those families who want their deaf children to learn to listen and talk, the benefits of AV therapy are clear. Around 80% of children who attend an AV therapy programme for at least two years achieve the same level of spoken language as their hearing peers, rising to 97% of children without additional needs. The



www.avuk.org

+44 (0)1869 325000

Auditory Verbal UK is a registered charity
(charity no: 1095133 in England & Wales and charity no: SC052499 in Scotland).
Registered company number: 4569764.

Auditory Verbal UK is the operating name of the Auditory Verbal Centre

majority of these children attend mainstream schools and they are attaining educational outcomes on a par with hearing children. The full return on government investment in diagnosis and hearing technology is being realised for these children. They are getting an equal start at school and the health and education benefits are lifelong. Further national and international research and evidence on the effectiveness of Auditory Verbal therapy can be found [here](#).

However, at present, over 90% of deaf children that could benefit from AV therapy are unable to access it and there are no qualified AV therapists working in the NHS and local services in Wales.

But with support and investment from the Welsh Government, we can change this. With an investment of only £800,000 over the next ten years, it is possible to train a small proportion of the current public sector workforce of speech and language therapists, audiologists and teachers of the deaf to embed 12 specialist therapists in the NHS and local services in Wales. We are urging the Welsh Government to consider taking the first steps towards making this a reality with the first tranche of funding being made available in the next financial year. By committing to one year's worth of funding, just £80,000, more deaf children can start to benefit from greater access to speech and language therapists and teachers of the deaf trained in this specialist approach.

We are currently working with a number of speech and language therapists and teachers of the deaf across Wales who have begun their training in this specialist approach, which has been funded by charitable trusts. Two teachers of the deaf, based in North Wales, are about to complete our foundation level training specialist approach but we need to expand the numbers in training to support all those who could benefit across Wales.

The economic case for investment

Analysis across the UK shows that investment in Auditory Verbal therapy for the families of deaf children can unlock £152 million of economic benefit, rising to £11.7 billion within the next 50 years through improved quality of life, employment prospects, lower costs of schooling and avoided injuries. Other developed countries like Australia, New Zealand and Denmark already provide state funding of AV therapy and Wales should strive to match this investment.

I appreciate the time you have taken to meet with us previously and the support you have shown in our mission to enable more deaf children to have the same opportunities in life as their hearing peers. I would ask that you and your Committee consider calling for the inclusion of funding for the provision of AV therapy across Wales in this year's Budget and that you raise the significant return on investment with relevant Ministerial colleagues.

Thank you for considering this submission to the Committee. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,
Anita Grover
Chief Executive



Jane Bryant MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

25 January 2024

Dear Jayne

Free School Meal Holiday provision

Thank you for your letter of 18 December in which you asked specific questions about the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) and our consideration of alternative schemes or measures to the holiday free school meal provision.

SHEP, which is branded as Food and Fun, is not a replacement scheme for holiday free school meal provision and operates only during the school summer holiday period for a minimum of 12 days. There are currently no plans to extend SHEP to other holiday periods. £4.85m provided by Welsh Government in 2023-4 enabled schemes to operate during Summer 2023.

Data on SHEP participation levels during Summer 2023 is available and is attached to this letter. The WLGA gather and analyse the data (year group, gender, and free school meal information) and has given permission for the data to be shared with Committee.

The decision not to reinstate provision of free school meals during school holidays, was informed by an integrated impact assessment (IIA), published [here](#), and recognised the negative impact of this decision. However as previously stated, due to the significant financial pressures facing the Welsh budget, provision of free school meals during the holidays was simply unaffordable and has ceased indefinitely.

The Welsh Government has a range of mitigating measures in place, as identified within the IIA. We have also provided a further £2m this year to support community food organisations to help families experiencing food poverty. Our support for food partnerships has also helped to enhance activity in each local authority area which is helping to put in place structures to tackle the root causes of food poverty and ensure that limited resources are targeted at the areas of greatest need.

During the school day, I committed to increase the availability of free school meals. Working with our Cooperation Agreement partners, Plaid Cymru, we are rolling out universal free school meals to primary school children. To date more than 15 million additional free

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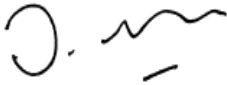
Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

meals have been served across Wales, with around 145,000 more pupils eligible since the beginning of this academic year.

I do, however, understand how difficult this is for families and my officials have written to local authorities reminding them of their discretion to provide meals without charging, and of the expectation that no child should be denied an offer of a meal if they arrive at school hungry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a series of wavy lines and a short horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language



Attendance

The WLGA provided an attendance sheet for schemes to take a log of all registered children and mark their attendance at Food and Fun. These sheets, which were anonymised, were then submitted to the WLGA.

In 2023, Food and Fun was delivered to 278.75 cohorts across 175 schemes, creating 11,150 places for children per operating day.

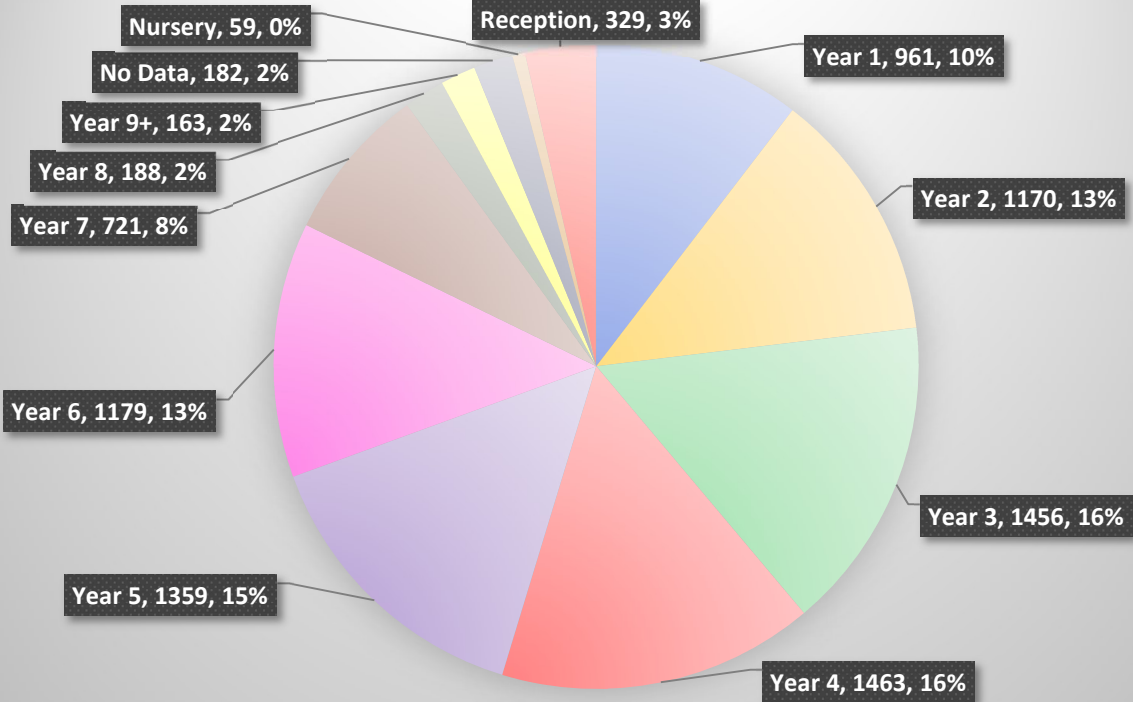
WLGA received attendance data from 154 schemes and one special school was exempt from this analysis due to utilising a different timetable model. Therefore, this analysis represents those 153 schemes (88%) delivering Food and Fun in 2023.

Based on returns from 153 schemes	2022	2023
Number of funded places for children	7,740	9,770
Potential Attendances	101,469	128,810
Total Actual Attendances	67,907 (67%)	82,241 (64%)
Number of children who attended at least once	6884	8546
...of which eFSM	2906 (42%)	3793 (44%)
Average number of days attended per registered child	8.8	8.9

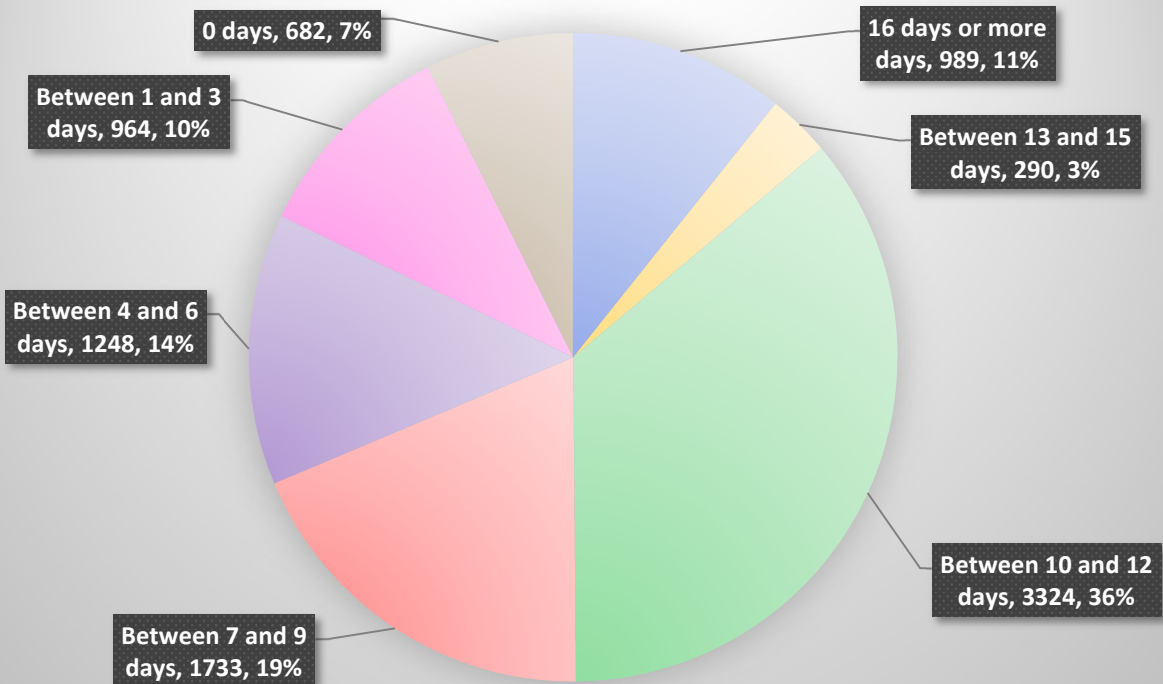




Year Group Split



Days Attended Per Child





Gender Split		
Gender	Count	%
M	4603	50%
F	4525	49%
Non-Binary	4	0.04%
No Data	98	1.1%

Please note that Year Group Split chart and Gender Split table above are inclusive of all registered children and therefore includes the 776 children who were registered for the scheme but did not attend.





Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Jayne Bryant AS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
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26 January 2024

Dear Jayne

Thank you for your letter of 21 December 2023 regarding the Welsh Language Commissioner's report on post compulsory Education and the Welsh Language: the learner's voice. The Welsh Government welcomes this research by the Welsh Language Commissioner which offers valuable information on the views and experiences of learners in the post-16 sector.

It is good to see that the vast majority of learners identify their experience of Welsh medium or bilingual education as good or very good. It is also pleasing to note that the vast majority of learners who are able to speak Welsh are proud that they can speak the language, and see it as an advantage for their career prospects.

We accept the need to improve our understanding of learners' reasons for not choosing to study through the medium of Welsh. We also note the Commissioner's concerns about the disparity between course availability in our colleges compared to our schools and the need for the post-16 sector to address the shortage of Welsh-medium provision in more vocational areas.

It is true to say that there are differences between schools and colleges in the nature of provision and the categories used to record the medium of provision. Colleges also face significant challenges in catering for learners with different levels of ability and fluency across a very wide range of subjects.

We have invested significantly in Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to increase capacity and 18% of learning activities in colleges now involve a component of Welsh, with the bulk of the provision being bilingual activities. We are working with the Coleg and hope to see this figure continuing to increase.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

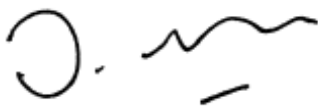
Despite the challenges noted above, we are disappointed that there has not been a greater increase in the numbers of students studying through the medium of Welsh in our colleges. We understand that we need to create more opportunities for young people to learn through Welsh and improve their Welsh language skills and we will continue to invest in the work of the Coleg Cymraeg.

The results of the research are timely as we establish the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. The Commission will need to work effectively with the Coleg Cymraeg, the National Centre for Learning Welsh, post-16 providers, and others to ensure adequate provision is available and increase the number of post-16 learners studying through the medium of Welsh.

In establishing the Commission, we bring together responsibility for the strategy, planning and oversight of tertiary education within a single body. This will strengthen the framework for planning and funding the post-16 provision, ensuring a more coherent approach for developing and maintaining Welsh-medium provision.

The aim is that the Commission will do more than just meet the current demand for Welsh-medium provision; it will also build the demand for Welsh tertiary education and encourage individuals to participate in Welsh language education.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'J' followed by a wavy line and a short horizontal stroke.

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language

Agenda Item 6

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

Agenda Item 7

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted