

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:

Hybrid – Committee room 2 Senedd
and video conference via Zoom

Meeting date: 6 December 2023

Meeting time: 09.00

For further information contact:

Naomi Stocks

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

At its meeting on 29 November, the Committee agreed a motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to exclude the public from Item 1 of today's meeting

1 Follow up work from the inquiry into services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(09.00 – 09.30)

(Pages 1 – 15)

Attached Documents:

Scoping Paper and proposed approach – Children on the Margins

Proposed approach – Care Inspectorate Wales / Social Care Wales

2 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

(09.30)

3 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – evidence session 1

(09.30 – 10.45)

(Pages 16 – 35)

Sam Rowlands MS, Member in Charge

Dr Dave Harvey, Member of the Senedd Support Staff

Micheal Dauncey, Senedd Researcher

Jen Cottle, Legal Services, Senedd

Attached Documents:

Research Brief



Break

(10.45 – 11.00)

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

(11.00 – 12.00)

(Pages 36 – 46)

Ceren Roberts, Director of Cardiff Residential Centre, Urdd Gobaith Cymru
Graham French, Deputy head of the School of Education, Bangor University,
Chair of the North Wales region for the Association of Heads of Outdoor
Education Centres and Chair of the North Wales regional committee of the
Institute for Outdoor Learning

Clare Adams, Outdoor Education Adviser for Monmouthshire County Council
and representing the Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel for England and
Wales

Mike Rosser, Education Visits Adviser for Denbighshire, Flintshire and
Wrexham, Project Lead for Welsh Government review of Visit Leader Training
within FE Colleges and representing the Outdoor Education Adviser's Panel
for England and Wales

Attached Documents:

Paper 1 – Institute for Outdoor Learning

Paper 2 – Urdd Gobaith Cymru

Paper 3 – Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP)

5 Papers to note

5.1 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

(Page 47)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education
Committee to the Llywydd and Chair of Business Committee

5.2 Cost of Living

(Pages 48 – 59)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Economy to the Chair of the Economy, Trade and
Rural Affairs Committee

5.3 Do disabled children and young people have equal access to education and childcare?

(Pages 60 – 67)

Attached Documents:

Additional information from the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, the Royal College of Occupational Therapists and the British Psychological Society

5.4 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 68 – 73)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Chief Executive Officer, Social Care Wales

5.5 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 74 – 76)

Attached Documents:

Llamau's consultation submission to the Finance Committee regarding the Draft Budget 2024–2025

5.6 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2024–25

(Pages 77 – 78)

Attached Documents:

Letter from the Minister for Education and Welsh Language

6 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

(12.00)

7 Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill – consideration of the evidence

(12.00 – 12.10)

8 Implementation of education reforms – consideration of the next steps

(12.10 – 12.30)

(Pages 79 – 89)

Attached Documents:

Implementation of education reforms: 3rd check-in – Scoping Paper

Agenda Item 4

Submission of evidence to the Children, Young People and Education committee regarding the proposed Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill, made on behalf of the Institute for Outdoor Learning by Graham French, North Wales regional chair.

1. This evidence is presented on behalf of the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) which is the professional body for organisations and individuals who use the outdoors to make a positive difference to others. Members have a shared vision of outdoor learning as a highly valued form of development education and employment in UK society.
2. As an organisation, our mission is to increase participation in outdoor learning in the UK and to recognise and improve the quality of outdoor learning provision. To do this, we have regional committees with members and elected chairs across the UK so the organisation can be locally responsive whilst having a national voice. The chair of the North Wales committee is presenting this evidence on behalf of the IOL.
3. This evidence will follow four main themes which are in alignment with our mission and consider the information already in the public domain concerning outdoor learning and the proposed bill. Each source of published evidence will be cited with a footnote to indicate the source.
4. These four themes are: finance; education; the moral imperative; practical considerations.
5. The IOL supports the introduction of the Outdoor Education (Wales) bill (hereafter 'the bill') proposed by Sam Rowlands, MS. The aims set out in the initial explanatory memorandum and subsequent debate in the plenary session of Senedd Cymru on 26th October 2022 are in alignment with the aims of the IOL set out above.

Finance

6. The explanatory memorandum of 2022 set out an expected cost of implementing the bill as being in the region of £14 million per year. Whilst it is unclear whether this includes the cost of transport and supply cover, this is clearly a significant expenditure that would be required from the Welsh Government, but the IOL believes that this would be money well spent and the investment would have significant benefits for both the children and young people and the economy of Wales.
7. Research using the Social Return On Investment (SROI) methodology, commissioned by Natural England¹, has demonstrated that learning in natural environments (of which the residential work outlined in the bill represents one aspect) has the potential to return anywhere between £2 and £7 per £1 invested. This return comes in the form of savings over a short-term and includes savings in health care through the NHS, mental health care through local authority Child and Adolescent Mental Health services (CAMHS), improved school attendance, and the development of social capital leading to greater career opportunities for the young people of Wales.
8. A study utilising the same methodology (SROI), commissioned by the Outdoor Partnership² to investigate the impact of programmes of outdoor education in North Wales concluded that a £7 return was made for every £1 invested.

¹ [Council for Learning Outside the Classroom Evidence Note, 2022](#)

² Social Value Cymru, [Opening Doors to the Outdoors](#)

9. Research commissioned by the Pembrokeshire Coastal forum, and the Wales Adventure Tourism Organisation³ and funded through Welsh Government's coastal capacity building challenge fund determined that the outdoor activity sector in Wales (of which outdoor education residential for children and young people form a significant part) brought £26.54 million of value to the mental health sector.
10. The same research concluded that a 10% increase in participation could bring about an increase in social value of £187 million spread across physical and mental health, mental wellbeing, individual development and social capital.
11. The research also identified a net economic impact of the sector as a whole as £272.87 million, of which £205 million is retained in Wales.
12. Based in these data, the IOL concludes that there are clear and tangible financial benefits of the bill which significantly outweigh its perceived initial cost.

Education

13. The IOL welcomed the publication of the draft Curriculum for Wales in January 2020 and contributed to the public consultation. The institute supports the Curriculum for Wales 2022⁴ as both its holistic foundation (the four purposes) and its specific direction to engage with outdoor learning are in alignment with the aims of the institute set out in paragraph 2, above.
14. The organisation of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 allows teachers to design curricula that are locally responsive whilst still ensuring equity in the curriculum through the statements of What Matters in each Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). This means more teachers can utilise an outdoor learning pedagogy across more topics than under the previous curriculum, and this aligns with the aims of the institute.
15. However, the access to outdoor education is inconsistent and of varying quality⁵. In 2018 the IOL supported the publication of 'High-quality outdoor learning for Wales'⁶. The IOL support legislative change to eradicate inconsistency in provision and support the offer of high-quality outdoor learning for every child and young person in Wales attending school. In previous editions of the Curriculum for Wales some aspects of outdoor education were a component of the physical education curriculum area under the heading 'adventurous activities'. This curriculum presence was not enough to ensure equity in provision as highlighted in a survey carried out by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) in the previous 12 months.
16. IOL members have a shared vision of the positive development education that can be attained through outdoor education and submit that this goes beyond the 'activities' nature in the previous curriculum descriptors. This vision aligns with the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales 2022⁴ and is a welcome change compared to other UK curricula which appear to focus on outcomes such as exam grades rather than the more holistic civic outcomes stated in the Curriculum for Wales 2022.
17. To achieve equity in provision of outdoor education and to allow children and young people to achieve the four purposes of the curriculum for Wales, the IOL agrees with the need for specific legislation to guarantee this provision. Whilst curriculum is enshrined in law, educational policy, such as that concerning educational visits like outdoor education residential visits, can change with party policy and in relation to local politics. This inconsistent approach (applied to the current date) has led to the inequity in provision, and therefore legislation is required to address this.

³ Miller Research Evaluation Consulting, [Economic and Social Evaluation of the Outdoor Activity Sector in Wales](#) (2023)

⁴ Welsh Government (Hwb website), [Curriculum for Wales](#)

⁵ The Sutton Trust, [Life lessons: Improving essential life skills for young people](#) (2017)

⁶ Wales Council for Outdoor Learning, [High quality outdoor learning for Wales](#) (2018)

18. If the vision of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 is to be realised, outdoor education needs to move from being a 'nice-to-have' enrichment activity, to being a core curriculum entitlement. This requires both legislation and funding from the Welsh Government.

The moral imperative

19. A national survey by the OEAP⁷ highlighted that the main barrier to participation in outdoor education residential visits was the cost to participants. Whilst some children and their families were able to access financial support to enable them to attend residential outdoor education visits, these were often the poorest in the school. Those just above the levels of income required to be eligible for this support, often referred to as 'the working poor' are unable to access these visits due to cost. Even those not in this category have found educational visits hard to fund as the cost-of-living crisis means their priorities are elsewhere.
20. The OEAP survey⁷ also found that in some cases visits are not offered to some children to avoid the social stigma of not being able to afford to attend, and this also encompasses whole schools in some of the most deprived areas (as defined by the Welsh index of multiple deprivation) who do not offer outdoor education residential visits at all, as they are aware very few of their families will be able to afford to attend.
21. There is much research which concludes the significant physical and mental health benefits of outdoor education residential⁸, yet these benefits are exclusively available to those in certain schools and with certain household incomes. This is inequitable and counter to the Welsh Government's Child poverty strategy⁹.
22. This inequity in provision of education provides a further reason why the IOL believes that legislation and funding are necessary to support the well-being of children and young people, as set out in the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) act of 2015.
23. The IOL welcomed the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) act (2015)¹⁰ and submits that the proposed bill would provide an obvious and tangible support for this landmark legislation already enacted by Senedd Cymru.
24. The IOL submits that the proposed bill will contribute to a prosperous Wales (see paras. 7, 8 and 9 above), a resilient Wales (see paras. 10 and 16 above), a more equal Wales (this section), a healthier Wales (see paras. 7 and 10 above), a Wales of cohesive communities (see paras. 7, 9 and 10 above), a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language (paras. 11, 13 and 14 above) and a globally responsive Wales (paras. 7, 14 and 16 above). It thus contributes to each of the seven wellbeing goals¹⁰.
25. These wellbeing goals also demonstrate how the proposed bill supports several UN sustainable development goals: 3. Good health and well-being; 4. Quality education; 10. Reduced inequalities; 11. Sustainable cities and communities¹¹. These are also goals supported by the IOL.

Practical considerations

⁷ Reported in Sam Rowlands MS, [Statistical Paper: Outdoor Education \(Wales\) Bill \(October 2022\)](#). OEAP Cymru issued the survey in October 2022 to the Outdoor Education Adviser at each of the local authorities in Wales which use its EVOLVE system to manage educational visits. They, in turn, circulated the online survey to maintained schools for completion and submission. OEAP Cymru also sent the online survey to the Outdoor Education Adviser at an additional local authority, which does not use the OEAP Cymru system. The survey was therefore shared with all but two local authorities in Wales (Pembrokeshire County Council and Torfaen County Borough Council) who do not currently have an OEAP adviser in post.

⁸ Kendall, S. and Rodger, J. (2015) [Evaluation of Learning Away: final report](#). London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

⁹ Welsh Government, [Child poverty strategy: 2022 progress report](#)

¹⁰ Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)

¹¹ Welsh Government, [National Indicators: mapping to Well-being and UN Sustainable Development Goals \(interactive tool\)](#)

26. In the explanatory memorandum presented to Senedd Cymru in Autumn of 2022, and subsequent details given during the phases of public consultation on the bill, it is clear that there is a degree of flexibility in the practical arrangements that the bill requires.
27. These allow local authorities to formulate and integrate how they deliver the requirements of the bill, in line with current operation of schools by directors of education in each local authority. This principle aligns with current practice in how directors of education in local authorities enact educational policy in their authority. The proposed bill does not alter this position, but will require some consideration on the part of those directors of education.
28. It is likely that should the bill be passed, these directors of education will need guidance from specialist outdoor education advisers on how they may most effectively implement the bill. These advisers are already in place in many cases, either employed specifically as such (the OEAP) and/or through teacher education partnerships with Welsh universities and regional consortia.
29. Directors of education may also want to consult with professional bodies that represent residential outdoor education centres (the Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres, AHOEC), and outdoor learning professionals (the IOL) alongside the OEAP members employed by local authorities.
30. Despite the concerns and necessity for the bill raised in the previous section around equitable access, there are schools that do engage in residential outdoor education visits. These local authorities, school leaders and education professionals need to be consulted to share their effective practice in how they overcome some of the logistical issues that are encountered when organising and running an outdoor education residential, such staff cover, gaining consent and ensuring the children have suitable equipment for the activities (although much is provided by the residential centres themselves).
31. The IOL has many members who are teachers organising these sorts of visits across the whole of the UK and can offer support and advice, and practical examples of how visits are run to individuals, schools and school leaders in dealing with some of these practical issues.
32. We accept that a one-size fits all model is not appropriate to reflect the different communities served by the range of schools in Wales. The bill does not appear to suggest that, but there will be consultation required by each local authority as to how to most effectively and efficiently implement the bill should it be passed.
33. AHOEC has members who are the providers of these residentials, and can also provide case studies of how outdoor education residentials are managed effectively to further share effective practice.

Summary

34. The IOL supports the proposed bill as it aligns with our mission and vision.
35. It appears that in its current format, the bill allows sufficient flexibility to allow each local authority to implement the bill in the most appropriate way for its context and communities.
36. There are many examples of how schools and school leaders have overcome some of the practical challenges to organising and running outdoor education residentials. As the bill does not call for wholly new practices, these existing effective solutions will need to be shared should the bill be passed so that practical and logistical considerations can be fully accommodated without diluting the principles at the heart of the bill: equity and inclusion.
37. The bill supports and enhances the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and its four purposes.
38. The inequitable situation in regard to access and provision of outdoor education residentials currently found in Wales requires legislative change to remedy the situation and bring equity.
39. There are significant financial benefits that will result from the implementation of the bill.
40. The bill tangibly supports the Well-being of future generations (Wales) act of 2015.

1. Who are we?

- 1.1 Urdd Gobaith Cymru aims to ensure opportunities and experiences, through the medium of Welsh, for all the young people of Wales to develop into fully confident citizens. We are an ambitious organisation that innovates to extend our offer to everyone. We have developed generations of young people to be proud of their country, open to the world and embodiments of our language and culture, as well as possessing the worldwide values that are respected in Wales. The Urdd is vital to the future of the Welsh language and for Wales.
- 1.2 Urdd Gobaith Cymru, Wales' largest youth organisation was founded in 1922. We are a unique organisation where the Welsh language is central to our service and which responds to the needs of children and young people today. It is unique in the world and we are recognised internationally as a leading example of successful youth provision through a minority language. The experiences we offer range from sporting opportunities, youth work, arts, residential, humanitarian, outdoor activities, international, apprenticeships, training and volunteering. The impact of our work ensures that children and young people can contribute positively to their communities and to society, broaden their horizons and increase their self-confidence.

2. Urdd residential centres

- 2.1 The Urdd residential centres are vibrant places that nurture individuals' development, creating a dynamic environment where the children of Wales can thrive. There are Urdd residential centres across Wales;
- Llangrannog in Ceredigion (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/llangrannog/>)
 - Cardiff residential centre (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/cardiff/>)
 - Glan-Ilyn and Glan-Ilyn Isa' in Gwynedd (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/glan-ilyn/> and the Glan-Ilyn Isa' website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/glan-ilyn-isa/>)
 - Pentre Ifan in Pembrokeshire (website: <https://www.urdd.cymru/en/residential-centres/pentre-ifan/>)
- 2.2 The residential centres provide a unique combination of educational and recreational activities, offering a holistic approach to learning. With first-class facilities and a focus on promoting the Welsh language and its culture, the residential centres play a central role in shaping well-rounded individuals. From outdoor adventures to cultural immersion, the Urdd's

residential centres create lasting memories and foster a sense of community, making them an invaluable asset for young Welsh learners.

3. Our audience

- 3.1 The centres provide accommodation for 103,000 visitors a year, and offer over 800 courses across the five centres.
- 3.2 52 per cent of Welsh schools visit the centres.
- 3.3 39 per cent of our visitors come from Welsh-medium schools, with 61 per cent coming from English-medium schools but seen as Welsh learners.
- 3.4 26 per cent of the schools that visited the centres come from the 20 per cent most deprived wards in Wales.

4. Individuals' development

- 4.1 The aim of the Urdd centres is to create be places that offer opportunities for residential children and youth to learn and socialise in a safe and welcoming Welsh-speaking environment. The centres develop children and young people by giving them the experience of being independent away from home and broadening the children and young people's horizons by offering activities outside of their normal experience. By meeting these challenges, children and young people will learn to adapt and compromise, thereby gaining the confidence that is absolutely key to developing into a well-rounded individual.
- 4.2 A survey looking at the wellbeing of children and young people who had visited the centres found that:
 - 83 per cent have seen an increase in their pupils' language use.
 - 76 per cent of pupils have increased their use of physical exercise in general.
 - 96 per cent see an improvement in their self-confidence.
 - 64 per cent have continued with the activities experienced for the first time in Llangrannog.
 - 97 per cent made a new friend.

5. Citizenship and the Welsh language

- 5.1 The Urdd residential centres operate on the ethos of Learning Through Activity, and we strongly believe that this ethos has proven effective in assisting the development and self-confidence of individuals.
- 5.2 At the Urdd residential centres, we create a safe and happy environment for all children and young people who attend. Our hope is to create relevant and memorable experiences for the young people so that they will enjoy the present and, at the same time, develop into independent balanced individuals, and kind, responsible citizens.
- 5.3 Quotes from teachers and parents:

“It was great to hear Welsh being used bilingually and during a range of activities. It made us, as teachers, give a great deal of thought of how we can improve our use of everyday Welsh within our own educational setting.”

“The trip enhances children’s understanding of the Welsh culture and ‘cynefin’. Visting the Senedd for example, highlighted the decision-making process for Wales. Seeing a large Welsh city also highlighted aspects of Wales that some children might not see.”

"This is an extremely valuable experience, from the point of view of the children, the sixth form prefects that come to help them, and the teachers. The fact that they hear young staff speaking Welsh is an eye opener for them and they also have to adjust their ears to a different way of speaking and dialect. The sixth form group, having been in Glan-llyn, take pride in their Welshness, and use the language without having to be encouraged to do so. This in turn has an impact on how the younger children are then more willing to use language and take pride in it."

“She absolutely loved her visits to you, thanks. She came with Pentyrch Primary in 2022 and with Radyr Comp in 2022 or 2023.. She is on the autistic spectrum and you were incredible with her. Her experiences at Llangrannog contributed to her increased sense of well-being, improved belief in her self, encouraged her level of confidence, and have enriched her enormous adventurous spirit. Llangrannog helped her to grow!!”

“The children had been taught some Welsh before coming. Hearing Welsh speakers gave them the confidence to try using it. The visit to the Senedd was fantastic and gave them a much deeper understanding of democracy.”

"The trip is beneficial for socialising and Welshness and developing independence"

6. Fund for All

- 6.1 Fund for All is a scheme that has been established by Urdd Gobaith Cymru, where individuals, companies and organisations fund children to attend the Urdd's summer courses.
- 6.2 The purpose of Fund for All is to ensure that every child in Wales has the opportunity to enjoy summer holidays, whatever their background or financial circumstances. Over 100 children and young people visited the Urdd's residential centres over the summer.
- 6.3 This year, the Urdd received a record 110 applications for the scheme, which was established in 2019. 18 per cent of the children and young people on the Urdd's summer courses were funded through the scheme.

- 6.4 The Fund for All is a scheme that offers children and young people living in poverty or challenging circumstances the opportunity to attend one of the residential centres in Glan-llyn, Llangrannog or Cardiff. 81 per cent of those who were offered a place receive free school meals.
- 6.5 Following the course, parents were asked if their children enjoyed the course. 100 per cent responded positively, and 96 per cent believed that their children had gained confidence since attending one of the courses.

7. Outdoor Activity Service

- 7.1 The service offers outdoor adventure experiences for children and young people across Wales. The activities are tailored for each course and include mountain biking, climbing, river walking, coastering, canoeing, paddle boarding, orienteering and much more. These courses are offered within our communities or as a residential centre experience. The Outdoor Activity Service also offers unique courses to highlight the benefits of the outdoors for mental health and specialises in providing Duke of Edinburgh Award expeditions through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.
- 7.2 The Outdoor Activity Service plays a vital role in fostering positive mental health and wellbeing among young participants. Participating in outdoor activities has shown its positive impact on health and wellbeing, which is supported by a wealth of evidence. Numerous studies have consistently shown that exposure to nature, along with physical activity, contributes significantly to stress reduction, improved mood, and general mental wellbeing.
- 7.3 In addition, the challenges presented during outdoor expeditions are an opportunity to build character and develop soft skills such as resilience, teamwork and problem solving. These experiences go beyond the traditional setting of the classroom, offering complete and holistic opportunities for personal growth that encompass both mental and emotional aspects. The programme's emphasis on outdoor learning fits seamlessly with the wider aim of nurturing resilient, well-rounded individuals with valuable life skills.
- 7.4 During the 22/23 financial year, the Outdoor Activity Service has worked with over 5000 children and young people. 3000 young people have taken part in the health and wellbeing program, with over 1000 young people completing an outdoor expedition over several nights.

**Submission of written evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee
by the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel Cymru, represented by Clare Adams (OEAP
Cymru Chair) and Mike Rosser (OEAP Member, North Wales)**

Introduction

The Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel (OEAP) is the leading body for guidance, advice and training in all aspects of outdoor learning and educational visits in England and Wales. The OEAP is the professional association supporting Outdoor Education Advisers and Educational Visits Advisers in their work with schools (and FE colleges in Wales), as well as other services to children and young people, such as youth services and social services.

The OEAP's aim is to ensure that every child in every school should have access to a comprehensive programme of high-quality outdoor learning, educational visits and adventurous activities as an integral part of their school curriculum.

The OEAP provides 'National Guidance': [National Guidance | \(oeapng.info\)](http://oeapng.info), an internationally recognised management tool for the organisation of high-quality outdoor learning, educational visits and adventurous activities. Welsh Government (WG) endorses OEAP National Guidance as the primary source of information and guidance in this field: [Educational visits and outdoor learning | GOV.WALES](http://gov.wales)

OEAP Cymru is the Welsh arm of OEAP, specifically supporting schools, FE colleges and other establishments for the benefit of children and young people in Wales [OEAP Cymru | \(oeapng.info\)](http://oeapng.info). OEAP Cymru members meet regularly with WG education advisers to discuss support for schools and FE colleges across Wales.

OEAP Cymru members support the proposed Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill as it seeks to provide high quality learning experiences for the children and young people of Wales as part of a broad and balanced curriculum in Wales, which is in line with the organisation's aim.

At the heart of the proposed Bill are the core values of fairness, equality and social justice.

Particularly during this period of economic uncertainty, the proposed bill seeks to ensure that the social and economic gap does not widen. Currently, we appear to be moving towards a situation where only the children of families that can afford it will be able to experience the wide-ranging benefits of participating in a residential outdoor education visit.

Under the Education Act 1996, schools are unable to charge for educational visits and may only ask for a contribution. Educational visits are only able to go ahead if there are enough contributions to make them viable, creating a disincentive for schools organising visits.

Whilst some local authorities provide subsidies to those on low incomes, the levels of subsidy vary across local authority areas. The OEAP survey conducted in 2022 on behalf of the Bill, showed that 23% of schools do not provide any subsidy to those who cannot afford to pay the contribution. The survey also showed that a third of primary schools (400 schools) are not offering any residential outdoor education provision. In over a third of those schools offering residential, only 75% of children take up the opportunity to participate, with the primary barriers being cited as finance and either parent or child anxiety.

Furthermore, across our local authority areas we are seeing a significant increase in mental health issues and children accessing local authority support for additional needs. Over the past few months, we have seen a rise in families asking schools and local authorities for additional financial help for a range of educational visits, including residential.

Outdoor Education Centre provision in Wales and England

Our residential outdoor education centres have seen a drop in the numbers of children attending from the schools who do offer residential outdoor education opportunities. For example, Conwy's Nant BH and Pentrellyncwmr Outdoor Centres have experienced an overall decrease of 12.05% at Nant since September 2021 and a total decrease of 6.56% at Pentre over the same period. Average numbers of learners have dropped from approximately 35 to approximately 27. 22 schools cancelled bookings at Nant as they could not meet the minimum number of 12 learners. Gilwern Outdoor Adventure Centre based in Monmouthshire also reported a pronounced drop in attendance figures over the past year as well as enquiries tapering off.

A similar pattern is emerging in England with reports from OEAP colleagues suggesting that although numbers of school bookings remain relatively stable in some areas, the duration for many has reduced from 5 to 3 days and the number of learners attending has also reduced. Anecdotally, non-attendance is primarily due finance and either parent or child anxiety and mental health issues. Where learners do attend, many are increasingly not staying overnight. The rising cost of transport is also a concern.

Impact of residential outdoor education opportunities on children and young people

The impact that a residential outdoor education visit can have on a child is often profound, with many children and adults recalling a residential outdoor education visit as being the most positively memorable experience of their primary school career.

The Curriculum for Wales 2022 sets out a vision for learners to become independent, confident, creative, problem-solving, critical thinking individuals who challenge themselves and are resilient to be able to live a full and active life.

Participation in high quality residential outdoor education experiences provides the opportunity to develop all these qualities as well as many other physical and mental skills for life as part of a pedagogy of outdoor learning embedded in schools throughout Wales.

WG guidance for delivering a broad and balanced curriculum state that 'schools should maximise the time learners spend outdoors' and that 'they should consider a wide range of pedagogical approaches that effectively use school and out-of-school learning to empower learners'.

In 2018, Wales Council for Outdoor Learning and OEAP Cymru produced the document 'High-Quality Outdoor Learning', which empowers schools to help develop children to meet these 10 key characteristics:

- Enjoyment
- Confidence & character
- Health and well being
- Social and emotional awareness
- Environmental awareness
- Activity skills
- Personal qualities
- Skills for life
- Motivation for learning
- Broadened horizons

The 'Learning Away' strategy, produced by the Paul Hamlyn foundation between 2008 and 2015 showed that by participating in a residential visit, there is a unique interplay between the natural environment, challenge and staying away from home that brings about pro-environmental behaviours, as well as enhancing learning, achievement and well-being of children and young people.

Research conducted by the Association of Heads of Outdoor Centres (AHOEC) in the UK suggested that the impact of a residential outdoor education experience has demonstrated outcomes related to: challenge and resilience, teamwork and supportive relationships with peers, communication skills, independence skills and recognising their own abilities, and positive relationships with teachers.

Summary

The Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill:

- will ensure equity across Wales for the opportunity for all children to be able to access residential outdoor education provision
- will support schools to enhance the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum
- may help reduce mental health issues
- will help value the outdoor education industry and contribute to its sustainability

Agenda Item 5.1

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Elin Jones MS

Y Llywydd and Chair of Business Committee

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddPlant
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddChildren@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddChildren
0300 200 6565

17 November 2023

The Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill

Dear Elin,

Thank you for your letter dated 14 November, which the Committee discussed at our meeting on 16 November.

We are content with the timetable as proposed, and do not envisage any significant issues with the key dates.

Yours sincerely,



Jayne Bryant MS

Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Agenda Item 5.2

**Pwyllgor yr Economi,
Masnach a Materion Gwledig**

**Economy, Trade, and
Rural Affairs Committee**

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd, Caerdydd, CF99 1SN
SeneddEconomi@senedd.cymru
senedd.cymru/SeneddEconomi
0300 200 6565

Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Bay, Cardiff, CF99 1SN
SeneddEconomi@senedd.wales
senedd.wales/SeneddEconomi
0300 200 6565

Vaughan Gething MS
Minister for Economy

26 October 2023

Senedd Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee: Cost of living pressures and the Young Person's Guarantee

Dear Minister

At its meeting on 28 September the Committee discussed cost of living pressures and the Young Person's Guarantee. This was a follow-up to a session held in November 2022. The meeting focused in particular on the impact of cost of living pressures on young people and their future education, employment and training opportunities. Evidence was taken from Careers Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association (Leader of Denbighshire County Council), CollegesWales and the National Training Federation Wales (NTFW).

Annex A to this letter sets out some key findings and points on which we would welcome a response. Following the session I received a letter from a civil engineering company in North Wales which raises some pertinent issues relating to apprenticeship recruitment and retention in the construction sector. I have therefore also attached this correspondence, and Annex A seeks a response on those specific issues.

Given the cross-cutting nature of responsibilities for delivering these key commitments in the Programme for Government, I am also copying this letter to the Minister for Education and Welsh Language for his consideration, and to the Chair of the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee for information.

Kind regards,

Paul Davies

Paul Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

CC: Jeremy Miles MS, Minister for Education and Welsh Language

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



Impact of cost of living pressures on young people's decisions

Careers Wales shared anecdotal evidence from careers advisers about choices being made by young people as a result of cost of living pressures, including concerns around contributing to overall household income, and parental influence on young people's choices because of how it might affect their parents' access to benefit payments. This is influencing choices young people are making as they are opting to go into low-skilled higher-paid jobs, rather than staying at college or on apprenticeship schemes. The cost and availability of transport remains a significant barrier, along with the cost of food and meeting other up-front costs, with Careers Wales reporting a 'perfect storm' of factors that are leading to young people making short-term decisions which will impact their longer term career prospects.

There was recognition from CollegesWales and the NTFW of positive changes since the Committee looked at this issue a year ago, including increases in further education enrolment and in numbers accessing Jobs Growth Wales Plus. The increase in the Educational Maintenance Allowance and other allowances for learners were welcomed, but it was felt that improvements in some data were still masking problems for students facing financial hardship and pressure to contribute to household income.

For example, CollegesWales described how their deprivation fund is being utilised to prioritise support for students struggling with costs. The NTFW described young people having to leave the family home to ease household costs and 'sofa surfing', while other learners were contributing to household income from their allowances, leaving them with less disposable income. The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) representative noted that engaging with the former 'semi-transient' young people was particularly difficult.

More support for upfront costs

While support is provided to young people retrospectively, for example to claim for travel costs, Careers Wales reported that young people are struggling to meet up-front costs due to a lack of disposable income. Another example given was meeting the up-front cost of getting required ID. Careers Wales said it has increased its support fund due to increased demand.

Recommendation 1: Careers Wales recommended that more needs to be done to address the problem of up-front costs acting as a disincentive to young people accessing employment and training opportunities. The Committee would welcome a Ministerial response on what more Welsh Government can do to address this particular issue of meeting up-front costs.

Evaluating the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) – better data

Careers Wales offered to share data it was collecting on college leavers with the Committee. The need for a better dataset across all delivery partners, including regional data to assess where gaps are and where more support can be best targeted, was a critical issue raised by witnesses.

Recommendation 2: Collaboration on data-sharing is vital to evaluate the success of the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), and the Committee would welcome more information on how Welsh Government is addressing this, and ensuring that data is shared effectively across the partners to inform future delivery of the YPG.

CollegesWales stressed the challenge with delivering the YPG is providing all young people with accurate and impartial advice about the full range of support and programmes available under the YPG umbrella. They noted this was something picked up in both Dr Hefin David MS's recent report on transitions to employment and Sharron Lusher's independent report of the Vocational Qualifications Review Board.

Recommendation 3: NTFW said that, with regard to the provision of accurate and impartial advice on the range of support and programmes available under the YGP umbrella, the partnership between Careers Wales and training providers needs to be "re-strengthened". The Committee would welcome you outlining what action you will take to help achieve this.

The Apprenticeship target and retention and completion rates

Welsh Government's published learner outcome measures show the completion rate of apprenticeships has fallen from 81 per cent in 2018-19 to 66 per cent in 2021-22. Careers Wales identified a number of reasons for this, including that many young people were giving up apprenticeships to take paid employment that would allow them to earn double the hourly rate they would earn as a year one apprentice, or even to take on seasonal jobs, which the Leader of Denbighshire County Council identified as a particular issue. An Engagement and Progress Coordinator (EPC) in West Wales reports that salary rates in part-time jobs make apprenticeships a "hard sell". Reduction in completion rates will also include some employers who have stopped offering apprenticeships, and **some employers have also advised Careers Wales that it is hard to sustain the right level of supervision for apprenticeships, or that lower productivity within the business is a barrier.**

The work being done by UCAS to promote apprenticeships was cited by Careers Wales as a 'chink of light', as evidence suggests interest being shown from some of the most disadvantaged parts of Wales.

Recommendation 4: The Committee would welcome more information on what assessment has been made of employers who have stopped offering apprenticeships, and the reasons for that, including the issues raised by Careers Wales around supervision and productivity, and what actions are being taken to address those barriers for employers.



Changes to frameworks and essential skills requirements

Concerns about the very low completion rates for care sector apprenticeships were raised, particularly as this is an area of high demand from employers. Careers Wales said action to amend the essential skills requirements had helped with some of the completion rates, but the other challenges around salary rates elsewhere and transport costs still remain. The Committee has also received evidence of changes to formal entry standards and skills requirements being an issue in the construction sector (see in more detail below).

The NTFW said that the process of Welsh Government agreeing new apprenticeship frameworks needs to be quicker and more responsive to employers' needs. **Delays in framework approval were identified as a problem, and the NTFW said it needs an employer-focused team, and rather than extending some existing frameworks there should be more focus on what employers are saying they need, and to publish a new framework.** Providers highlighted the importance of work with Qualifications Wales to adjust the length of stay for courses appropriately in areas such as construction, to help with retention rates.

Recommendation 5: The Committee would welcome more information on how concerns highlighted around the design and approval process for apprenticeship frameworks, the responsiveness of the process and the involvement of employers in that process, are being addressed.

Apprenticeships for plant operatives

The Committee has received correspondence from Jones Bros Ruthin Co Ltd (at Annex B) a leading civil engineering company raising specific concerns about changes to the apprenticeship frameworks for plant operatives. These include a recent decision by Welsh Government to cease funding the Level 2 apprenticeship and transition to a Level 3 apprenticeship framework, which unlike Level 2, includes a requirement to attend 700 hours of classroom-based learning over 3 years whilst being paid wages. While understanding the rationale, the employer says that a 'significant proportion' would struggle with the increased academic demands and this will negatively impact on recruitment numbers. They raise a number of problems with delivering the new framework that demonstrate "the practical implementation of the Level 3 framework appears to have been inadequately considered", and believe that the shift to focus on academic learning could discourage more practical individuals from pursuing civil engineering careers.

The company also highlighted the stipulation that plant operative apprentices must work over 51% of their time in Wales as a barrier. The company is actively pursuing projects in England and Scotland due to a decline of infrastructure investments in Wales, which they say would reduce the number of projects where they could employ apprentices whilst adhering to the 51% rule.

Recommendation 6: The Committee has been made aware that a leading civil engineering company in Wales is seeking a revaluation of the Level 3 Apprenticeship Framework given the practical challenges they highlight, and for flexibility in meeting the 51% working time rule in Wales. The Committee would welcome a response from the Minister on these specific points.

Parity of esteem for vocational qualifications and progression pathways

Careers Wales said that one of the biggest issues they face is demonstrating to parents, rather than young people themselves, that apprenticeships can compare equally to a traditionally academic pathway, with some parents being "quite single-tracked in terms of thinking that if you want to get on, you do A-levels and then you do a degree".

Recommendation 7: Careers Wales accept that more needs to be done to demonstrate, to parents in particular, that it is possible to progress between the apprenticeship levels for a full career pathway, including up to degree apprenticeship level. These concerns are not new, but the Minister's views on how to proactively address this barrier would be welcomed.

Addressing barriers relating to benefit payments

Careers Wales, the WLGA and the NTFW all reported this as an issue. The NTFW acknowledged that the Welsh Government has done some positive marketing this year, but feel **there is an opportunity for the Welsh Government and the Department for Works and Pensions to add to that messaging, to highlight to parents that allowing young people to join a Jobs Growth Wales Plus programme and access increased allowances will not impact their universal credit.**

The NTFW also note that some parents will support the young person to join a Jobs Growth Wales Plus programme, but then discourage them from going into employment due to the impact on their benefits, so a bigger discussion is needed regarding how to address this issue. Working Denbighshire is engaging with parents but said the statistics demonstrate that take-up is still not as high as it could be.

Recommendation 8: The Committee would welcome a response from the Minister on what more can be done by both Welsh Government and the Department for Work and Pensions to address barriers to the take-up of programmes offered under the Young Persons Guarantee due to concerns about the impact on household benefit payments.

Regional and rural-urban disparities

The divide between rural and urban areas of Wales in terms of both provision of apprenticeships and access to them was highlighted by CollegesWales, the NTFW and Careers Wales. In particular, the **lack of available transport options and/or transport costs**, were identified as a major issue for learners in mid and west Wales. This was seen as more of an issue than Welsh language provision, although

Careers Wales also said more can still be done to promote awareness of opportunities to learn in Welsh, and for young people to understand the demand from employers for bilingual employees.

Recommendation 9: The Committee would welcome a Ministerial response on the work being done to promote greater awareness both of the opportunities to continue learning in Welsh and the high demand from employers for bilingual employees.

Prohibitively expensive transport costs mean that some young people are reliant on parents. We were given the example of a 17 year old on an NHS apprenticeship who was wholly dependent on the parent taking them to and from work. In this instance a flexible programme could be offered to the apprentice, but this will not always be the case. CollegesWales also provided a stark example of an apprentice learner in Pembrokeshire, who due to the cost of travel to and from their employer in Milford Haven, had to work for two and a half hours before earning any take home pay. In rural areas some people may need to move to live with other family members to access training or walk long distances. Careers Wales said that schools, colleges, providers and careers advisers were reminding young people of Welsh Government's MyTravelPass scheme for bus and rail, but sometimes getting to a discounted service in the first place was more of a problem for young people.

Careers Wales noted that equality of access is more of a problem with any training programmes in more sparsely populated rural areas. Lack of funding was identified as an issue to address disparities, and the NTFW identified the need for geographical uplifts to funding to help young people with accessing training and jobs, including for those from more deprived backgrounds and with self-declared disabilities. Lisa Mytton from the NTFW also highlighted that Jobs Growth Wales Plus was the only post-16 programme which did not receive the 5% cost of living increase this year.

Recommendation 10: The Committee would welcome the Minister's response on the prioritisation of uplift funding to address the specific regional and rural/urban disparities it has highlighted in access to education, training and employment opportunities across Wales.

Consistent careers advice from primary level

The Welsh Government's 'Young Person's Guarantee national conversation report' found that schools had failed to prepare young people and that careers advice was sporadic and aimed more at those who were more academic. Careers Wales said they were surprised at that feedback, advising that they do work in primary schools to offer intensive support, and have developed some resources to support primary teachers. They emphasised the importance of repeated engagement with young people.

Supporting transition by linking schools with employers

Dr Hefin David's recent work on transitions to employment identified pockets of good practice, but there is a disconnect between schools and employers which is affecting the ability to give young people a full picture of the opportunities available to them. CollegesWales highlighted the initiative

being undertaken in West Wales in relation to linking schools, employers and providers on skills for the offshore wind energy sector. However, there is a need to scale up good practice across Wales.

Careers Wales have access to an employer database which schools currently lack. Colleges have people employed to seek out employers, but schools do not have access to this pool of employers, and rely on an informal network of parents who are employers or have links with employers. There would be mutual benefit for schools offering access to pupils aged 11 to 16, and colleges offering schools better access to employers. Careers Wales advised they have access to an education business exchange database of 10,000 employers which could be developed into a work experience database - they could facilitate a greater link between further education and schools, and would welcome that approach, but would need a directive from the Welsh Government.

Recommendation 11: The Committee recommends that Welsh Government provide clear direction to ensure that colleges and schools are working together to help learners progress into employment, including through a service level agreement (SLA) on information sharing and exchange between Further Education and schools, with Careers Wales acting as an 'honest broker' in this regard. The Committee recommends this requirement for an SLA on information sharing and exchange is included in Welsh Government remit letters for Careers Wales and the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.

Awareness of the Employment and Enterprise Bureaus

CollegesWales gave some positive headline figures on the success of the bureaus in helping further education students into work placements and with essential skills for employment, but NTFW said more work needed to be done to raise awareness among young people of the existence of the bureaus.

Recommendation 12: The Committee would welcome a response from the Minister on what work is being done by the Welsh Government to further promote the existence and role of the bureaus, beyond the presence on the Business Wales website.

Job-coaching as part of transition support for pupils with additional needs

Careers Wales see a role for themselves in job coaching initiatives such as that offered by the Engage to Change project at Cardiff University for those with additional learning needs, but identified funding as a potential barrier to extending this work, now that project is at an end.

Recommendation 13: It was noted that both Jobs Growth Wales Plus and Communities into Work+ programmes provide support to young people with additional needs, however the Committee would welcome more information from the Minister regarding future plans for job coaching initiatives and for Careers Wales's involvement in them.



Other Barriers to Education, Training and Employment

Careers Wales identified increased absenteeism; problems accessing children educated otherwise than at school; and patchy data-sharing between local authorities as being additional barriers to reaching some young people. They reported concerns about reaching the target numbers of young people in the coming months, beyond the 'peak time' to access them at the start of the academic year.

Careers Wales also raised the difficulties of engaging with young people with behavioural, severe anxiety or other mental health problems, low confidence and low self-esteem, and those who are very isolated and rarely if ever leave the home. It was recognised that Jobs Growth Wales Plus is devised to be flexible to adapt to meet the needs of these hardest-to-help young people, to build up attendance and confidence gradually, to provide 'niche provision' to address specific issues such as debt and budgeting advice, and reaching out to young people in specific settings such as boxing clubs. The opportunity to keep re-engaging with these young people in a 'long game', and the importance of partnership working in the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework was emphasised.

Recommendation 14: The Committee would welcome any further information the Ministers for Economy and Education can provide on how the Welsh Government is applying lessons learnt in implementing the Young Person's Guarantee and the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, to further flex support to address the additional barriers identified by Careers Wales and other witnesses.

Anthony (Tony) Murphy
Head of HR & Business Management Systems
Jones Bros. Ruthin (Civil Engineering) Co. Ltd
Ty Glyn, Canol Y Dre,
Ruthin,
Denbighshire
LL15 1QW
anthonym@jones-bros.com
01824 703661

27th September 2023

Mr. Paul Davies MS
Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Senedd Cymru - Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Dear Mr. Paul Davies MS,

Subject: Concerns Regarding Changes to Apprenticeship Frameworks for Plant Operatives

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to you on behalf of Jones Bros. Ruthin (Civil Engineering) Co. Ltd, a leading civil engineering company based in North Wales. As the Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee in the Senedd, we believe you can help us address a pressing issue that has recently emerged in our industry.

Jones Bros has been a prominent figure in the field of civil engineering for several decades, and we have consistently invested in the development and retention of a highly skilled workforce. One of the cornerstones of our approach has been our commitment to apprenticeship schemes, which have played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of numerous individuals and supporting our operations.

Our apprenticeship programs have been integral to our ability to self-deliver many of our projects, as they enable us to grow a workforce of professionally qualified Engineers, Ecologists, Surveyors, Plant Operatives, and other professional support roles. Over the years, we have taken great pride in our training initiatives, including our 4-year Higher Engineer apprenticeship scheme and our Operative training scheme, which was formerly a Level 2 Plant Operative apprenticeship.

We have successfully delivered the Plant Operative Level 2 apprenticeship in-house at our accredited training centre for over a decade. This approach allowed us to train apprentices on various plant equipment within our facilities and according to our timeframes. These apprenticeships have been a crucial part of our strategy and have yielded excellent results.

Jones Bros Ruthin (Civil Engineering) Co Ltd
Ty Glyn, Canol Y Dre, Ruthin, Denbighshire, LL15 1QW
Tel: 01824 703661 Email: information@jones-bros.com www.jones-bros.com

Registered in England and Wales: 00983459



Over the last 10 years Jones Bros has recruited more than 308 apprentices with an 87 to 90% completion rate.

One of the key points of concern arises from the recent decision by the Welsh Government to cease funding the Level 2 apprenticeship and transition to a Level 3 apprenticeship framework. While we understand the rationale behind this change, we are confronted with several challenges that need to be addressed.

Under the Level 3 framework, apprentices are required to attend 700 hours of classroom-based learning at college over three years, during which we would need to continue paying their wages. Unlike the Level 2 framework, which had no formal entry standards, the Level 3 apprenticeship expects learners to have a good basic understanding of English and Math. It is recommended that they develop further formal skills in these areas, such as Essential Skills or GCSEs.

Up until this point, our only requirements for prospective plant apprentices have been that they must be at least 18 years old, possess a valid driver's license, and be willing to work away from their place of residence.

The Level 3 apprenticeship does not require specific formal entry criteria. Nevertheless, on the City & Guilds Skills for Wales website, you can find information regarding Construction – Plant Operations Level 3, which outlines the following details:

“There are no formal English and maths entry requirements for these qualifications. But it is expected that learners will have a good basic understanding of English and maths. It is recommended learners develop further formal English and Maths skills, such as Essential Skills or GCSEs to support successful progression with this programme”.

Our experience indicates that a significant proportion of apprentices who successfully completed the Level 2 framework would struggle with the increased academic demands of the Level 3 apprenticeship. Many of these individuals might not even complete the Level 3 due to their difficulties with English and Math. Given our history with such applicants, we believe they would be reluctant to sign up for the Level 3 apprenticeship, making it challenging to maintain our previous recruitment numbers.

Moreover, the Level 3 apprenticeship extends the overall duration by almost a year compared to the Level 2, and the requirement for apprentices to spend over 700 hours in college further complicates our ability to run the program effectively, given the diverse and widespread nature of our projects across the UK.

Furthermore, we would like to highlight that the additional 700 hours of learning required in the Level 3 apprenticeship framework introduces learning objectives that would typically be covered at a much later stage in a civil engineering career, typically as individuals progress into site supervision roles. The standard entry level for personnel on civil engineering project sites is the Site Supervision Safety Training Scheme (SSSTS), followed by advancement to the Site Management Safety Training Scheme (SMSTS). The transition period between completing the Level 2 apprenticeship we had been delivering and entering into site supervision roles is vital. During this period, less academically inclined operatives have the opportunity to gain valuable hands-on experience on construction sites. This practical experience greatly enhances their chances of building a successful and fulfilling career in the civil engineering industry.

We believe that the shift to the Level 3 framework, with its focus on academic learning, could inadvertently discourage individuals who are more practically inclined from pursuing careers in civil engineering. It is

Jones Bros Ruthin (Civil Engineering) Co Ltd

Ty Glyn, Canol Y Dre, Ruthin, Denbighshire, LL15 1QW

Tel: 01824 703661 Email: information@jones-bros.com www.jones-bros.com

Registered in England and Wales: 00983459



essential to acknowledge the importance of practical experience in our industry and find a way to strike a balance between academic knowledge and on-the-job skills development.

In the third year of the Level 3 apprenticeship, apprentices must complete a practical project on all four machines within the apprentice framework. Each project requires an assessor to carry out two site visits, resulting in a total of eight visits per apprentice. Currently, we do not possess the necessary resources to handle this workload alongside the number of apprentices we employ.

Another significant challenge is the stipulation that Plant Operative apprentices must work over 51% of their time in Wales. With a decline in infrastructure investments in Wales, we are actively pursuing projects in England and Scotland, which inevitably reduces the number of projects where we can employ apprentices while still adhering to the 51% rule.

Our primary concern is that the practical implementation of the Level 3 framework appears to have been inadequately considered, leaving us with numerous unanswered questions regarding the future of the individuals we have been offering opportunities to for over a decade.

Considering these challenges, we kindly request your support in addressing the following issues:

- Revaluation of the Level 3 Apprenticeship Framework: We urge the Welsh Government to reconsider the move to the Level 3 apprenticeship framework for Plant Operatives considering the practical challenges it presents to employers like Jones Bros.
- Adaptation to Changing Work Opportunities: Given our expanded operations in other parts of the UK, we ask for flexibility in meeting the 51% working time requirement in Wales.

We kindly request your support in addressing these concerns and finding a way to ensure that the apprenticeship framework aligns with the realities of the civil engineering field. Your assistance in advocating for these necessary adjustments will contribute to the continued growth and prosperity of the industry while providing opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds to succeed within it.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response. If you require any further information or would like to discuss this issue in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me at anthonym@jones-bros.com or 07768 375714.

Sincerely,



Anthony (Tony) Murphy
Head of HR & Business Management Systems
Jones Bros. Ruthin (Civil Engineering) Co. Ltd

Jones Bros Ruthin (Civil Engineering) Co Ltd
Ty Glyn, Canol Y Dre, Ruthin, Denbighshire, LL15 1QW
Tel: 01824 703661 Email: information@jones-bros.com www.jones-bros.com

Registered in England and Wales: 00983459



Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

24 November 2023

Dear Jayne Bryant MS,

RE: Inquiry on access to childcare and education for disabled children

Thank you for the opportunity to give oral evidence before the committee as part of the above inquiry. Please see attached a short follow up document from the Royal College of Occupational Therapists, British Psychological Society and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists which further builds on our evidence with regards to potential recommendations. The letter also provides several good practice examples for committee consideration within the annex.

1. Workforce planning

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) should prioritise long-term workforce planning (5-10 year) and have a far greater focus on children and support for families as part of the preventative agenda. Horizon scanning for the plan must include discussions with education and social care.

2. Apprenticeships for Allied Health Professionals (AHPs)

In response to recruitment challenges, especially in more rural areas, HEIW should prioritise developing alternative routes into professions. There is good learning from developments in England with regards to apprenticeship models. Such an approach would also require a change in thinking from Welsh Government with regards the apprenticeship levy.

3. Data

The current paucity of data on AHPs in terms of where they are based, specifics around their roles and Welsh language skills negatively affects the ability to effectively utilise professions, ensure vacancies are filled, and provide insight for future workforce planning. HEIW should commit to develop an AHP workforce plan as produced for pharmacy, nursing and dentistry to improve understanding of the composition of the workforce and maximise the potential of the AHP contribution.

4. Teaching Assistants and support staff

Teaching assistants have an invaluable role in working with children and families. We believe it may be appropriate to consider ring-fenced funding for the teaching support workforce and how further value could be placed on such roles. There is learning here from initiatives with regards the health care support worker workforce. For example, registration, initiatives around pay, pathways, mandatory training. There is also a similar need to consider how the childcare workforce is valued and supported.

5. Understanding of concepts of equity and inclusion

Training for professionals working within children's health and education should have a clear focus on equity and inclusion as a key underpinning factor to the cultural changes required for the Additional Learning Needs legislation to be effectively delivered. We need clarity, consistency and a shared understanding in the language used across the range of professionals working with children, young people and their families.

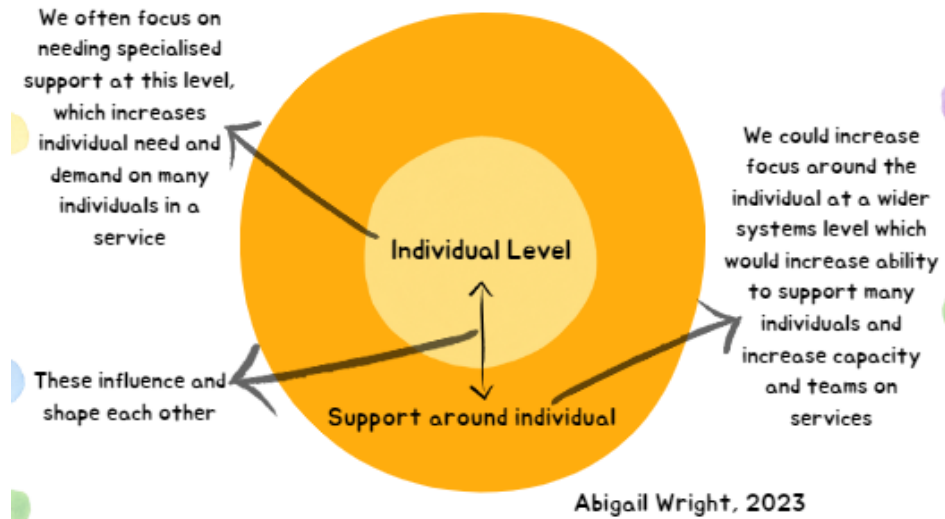
6. Sharing best practice

Regional partnership boards should have a key role to play in identifying best practice and sharing across Wales to prevent postcode lotteries of support. It is essential that boards effectively work with education colleagues in addition to those within health and social care.

7. Developing Circular Models of Support

The current system of support is based on a linear model where activity and support is provided through planned levels of progression. As life isn't often "planned" and development/support is not linear in itself., what we need instead is a circular model that puts the child at the centre, with appropriate support mapped out around the child, to ensure that their priority needs are met at time that it's required. A focus on need rather than diagnosis, prevents problems from becoming more complex or urgent resulting in fewer children and young people requiring more costly, specialist services, and those with the most complex needs can access AHPs when they need it.

Leaders should look to develop multi-agency services that combine colleagues across education, social services and health underpinned by a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities to ensure effective collaboration. There should also be a priority placed on increasing access to support services within the community by providing more informal, accessible and general advice in a format that best suits and includes the needs of the baby, child or family. An illustration of a circular model of support is provided below.



8. Initial teacher Education (ITE)

As a general point, we feel that given the introduction of the new curriculum, there should be a focus on supporting a holistic understanding of a child’s development, which starts with a good understanding of pedagogy. We are concerned that there is insufficient focus on speech, language and communication (SLC) development, skills and needs in the initial teacher education curriculum. Given that speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are the most common additional learning need in Wales (Welsh Government, 2023), we advocate that the ITE should be reviewed. There should be mandatory training for teachers on how to support SLC skills, and how to identify and support SLCN.

AHPs could also provide training & support to help educators and childcare providers understand and support children and young people’s physical, sensory and cognitive development. Training might focus on sensory needs, developing fundamental movement skills and approaches for handwriting

9. Equipment

Gaps in provision of essential equipment can delay children’s access to education and put their safety/wellbeing (and that of their carers) at risk. There should be procurement arrangement with partners across health and education to purchase and recycle equipment to help children and young people access nurseries and schools and reduce unnecessary costs.

Beyond specific equipment, there should be a focus on ensuring inclusive environments that help to support and enable all children – as these can be a barrier from the offset without a focus on this. For example, outdoor environments, sensory areas, low demand areas, seating arrangements etc. Whole school policy can also help shape and support to include all children and learners with different needs.

10. Extension and expansion of the Welsh Government Talk With Me programme

It was clear from the early years evidence session that the WG Talk with Me programme is making a difference within the early years especially in relation to training on SLC for early years practitioners. There needs to be a clear plan for the future of the Talk with Me programme and consideration of its extension into an older age-group given the prevalence of SLCN and link with poorer attendance and exclusions.

11. Further guidance from Welsh Government on linkages between key legislation and the new curriculum

We believe it would be helpful for Welsh Government to produce further guidance and support on the read across between key legislation, frameworks and the new curriculum. This would help to reduce the likelihood of staff perceiving these developments as singular and in isolation which is leading to significant implementation challenges.

We hope this paper is of interest to the committee and would be happy to provide further information if helpful.

Yours sincerely.

Pippa Cotterill, Head of Wales Office, Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

Dai Davies, Professional Practice Lead – Wales, Royal College of Occupational Therapists

Abigail Wright, Senior Specialist Early Years Educational Psychologist – BPS Education Psychology Lead for Wales

Annex A: Good practice examples

Communication Intervention Team (ComIT)

ComIT is hosted by Torfaen County Borough Council and works regionally in Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport and Torfaen. ComIT is a school-based service to help children and young people aged 3 to 13 years with a non-clinical diagnosis of speech, language and communication need that is severely affecting the child's learning.

ComIT can work individually or with groups of children - a child does not have to hold a statement of Special Educational Needs to access the service - and provides:

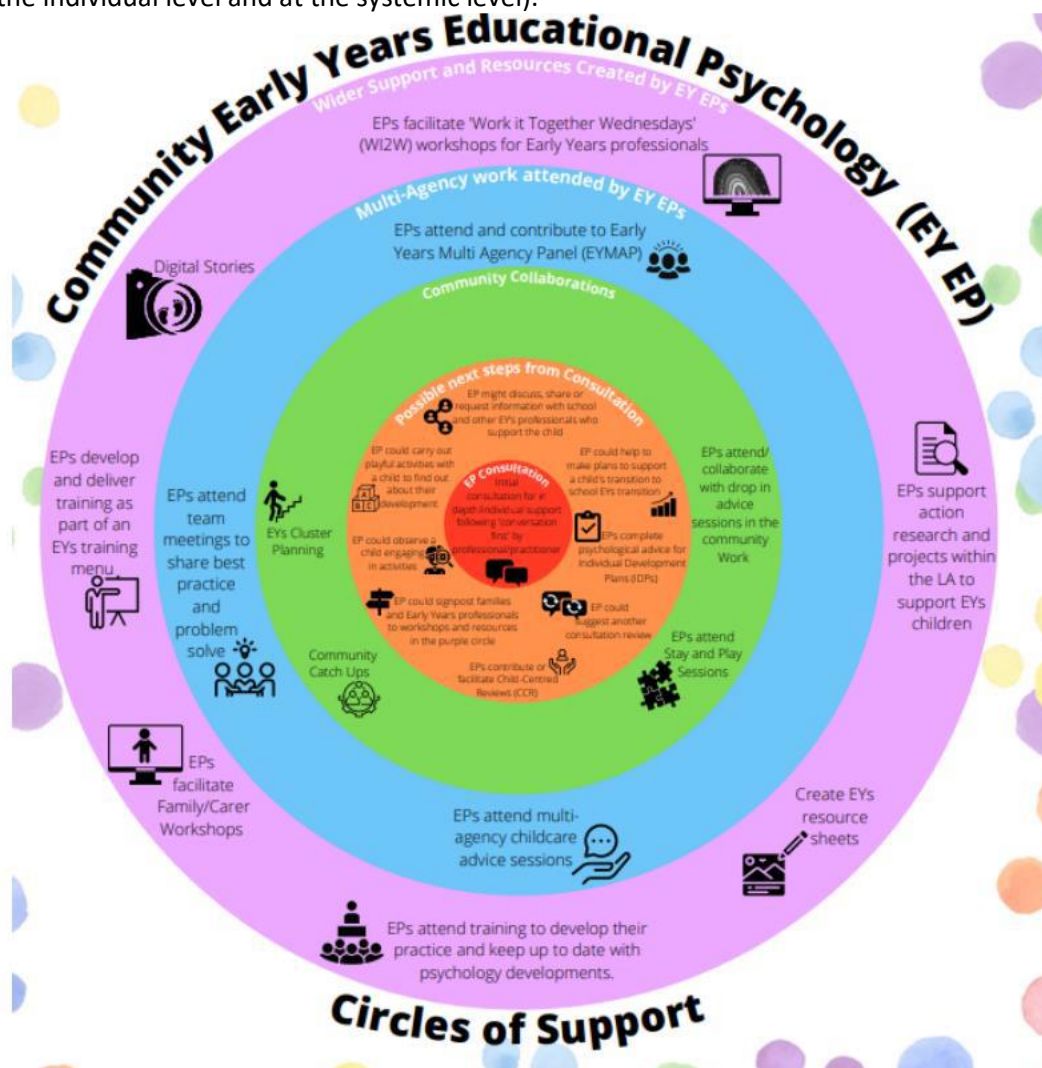
- advice and information on aspects of speech and language
- solutions, resources and strategies through individual and group work
- liaison with other professionals including speech therapy
- training for school staff to build capacity

Requests for ComIT to work with a child come from local authorities. **Further information is available on the ComIT website**

NPT Early Years (Preschool) Community Educational Psychology Team

In September 2021, our 'Community Early Years Educational Psychology Circles of Support' model was launched at the same time as implementation of ALNET (Additional Learning Needs Educational Tribunal [Wales] Act, 2018) for preschool aged children: As part of our community EY EP Circles of Support model, we all work as a team to support families across NPT (Neath Port Talbot).

Our model of support is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which illustrates how varying factors within a child's environment/context can shape their development. We have a 0.5 FT equivalent community EY EP supporting a specific community. There are six communities which are defined by school catchments for each secondary school in NPT (and feeder primary schools) and therefore the area which a child is likely to access education and activities within a community. Each community has an 'Early Years Community Educational Psychologist' link. The circular model of support (below) aims to provide support at varying levels depending on the child's need – from access to training/resources ('purple circle') for all EYs families to individual early advice/ support with families through [consultation](#) ('red circle'). Multi-agency work and collaboration within the community (either physically or with the community that surrounds the child/family) is key to supporting all our work (e.g. at the individual level and at the systemic level).



Systemically, we aim to act as a link to support and collaborate with a community of preschool professionals/practitioners, for example Health Visitors, Parenting/Children and Family Team, Speech and Language Therapy, Social Services. We hope to develop our use of psychology systemically to help understand who might be best placed, at the right time to support a child. Furthermore, this model of support aims to promote the communities understanding of psychology and child development so that families (and those that support them) feel empowered to adopt a strengths based and solution focused approach in understanding what works and might have the greatest impact for a particular family or wider community.

We take a holistic approach to supporting each individual child, their family and community. Therefore, our support will differ according to the individual strengths and the needs of each child and family. We focus on what the child/children 'can do' to help provide advice on what they 'may need support for'. We try to empower the adults who are important for the child to make positive changes to their development, learning, and wellbeing. Usually our support will start with an [initial consultation with the family at the centre of this](#). These are some other ways we support before and/ or after this:



Finally, we also complete work as part of a team to support the development of our skills as individual EPs and as a team, as well as our colleagues across the LA and Health Services/teams, through:

- Contributing and attending monthly community EY EP Team meetings and half-termly team development days.
- Contributing to wider EY EP regional/national forums (twice a term).
- Attending training for continuous professional development (as appropriate).

We have developed a number of booklets/videos and resources, including a booklet for families about our offer of support here, where further information about the model can be found.



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

27 November 2023

Sent via email

Dear Jayne Bryant MS,

Cc Julie Morgan MS, Deputy Minister for Social Services

Re: The use of agency staff in children's services

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your letter on 10 October 2023 asked Social Care Wales to clarify a number of points. I apologise for the delay in sending these to you, but I asked the team to provide data from September 2023 so you have the most recent picture from the register of social care professionals.

Our response is laid out in the attached briefing as we note in the response we are also preparing a fuller report on the profile of Social Workers in Wales if this would be of interest, we would happily share a version when available.

Best wishes

Sue Evans
Chief Executive Officer

Cadeirydd/Chair: Mick Giannasi CBE
Prif Weithredwr/Chief Executive: Sue Evans

0300 30 33 444
gofalcymdeithasol.cymru
socialcare.wales

Children, Young People and Education Committee - Briefing Note - The use of agency staff in children's services – November 2023

1. Is this figure of 49 from April 2023 a percentage figure or is it the number of individual staff?

The figure of 49 represents staff members. It is not a percentage. The figure was taken from the following document (Page 6, paragraph one):

<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s134519/Social%20Care%20Wales.pdf>

and was based on the data provided by the employers across the sector in the 2022 workforce data collection process. The confirmation of this figure as a percentage in the subsequent email was an error by Social Care Wales.

2. As of September 2023, what is the total number of children's social care staff in the workforce in Wales? (along with the vacancy rate and the percentage of agency staff)

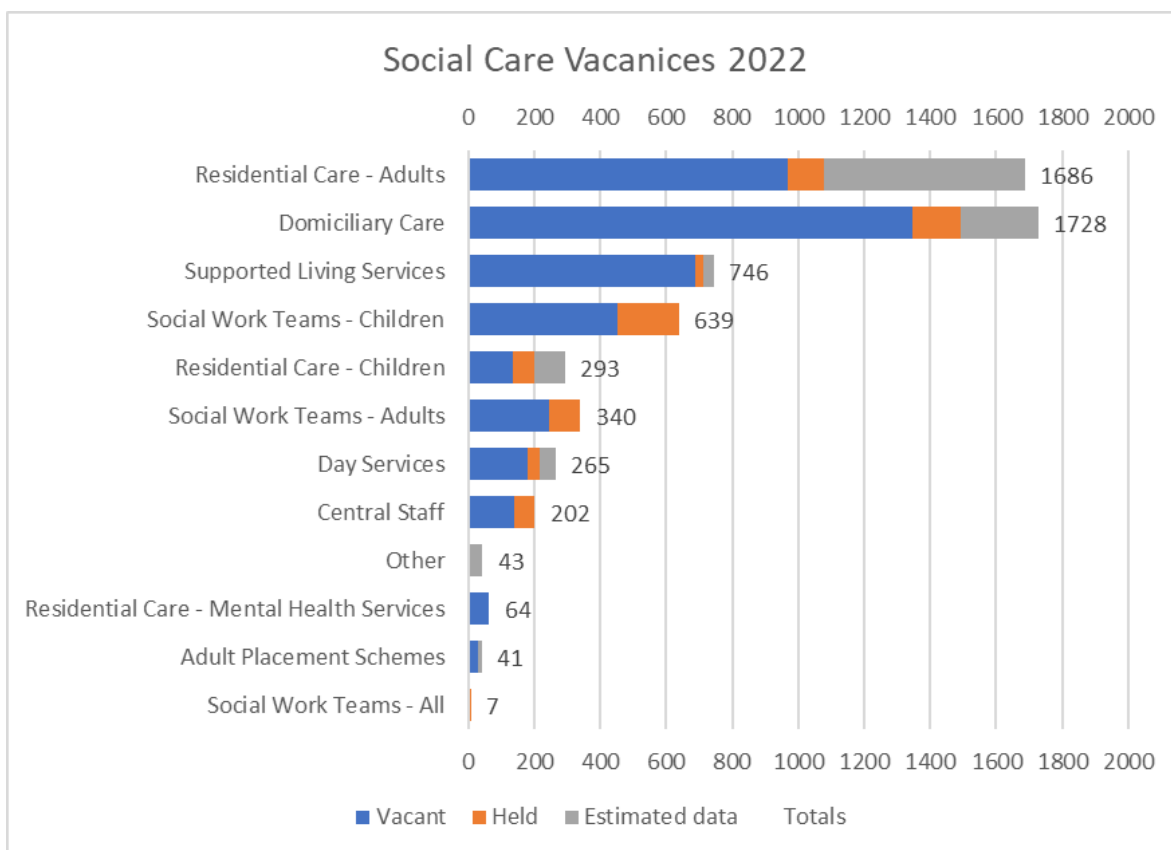
As of September 2023, the register shows the total number of Children's Residential Care workers is: 2,879. Of these 3.3% (95) identify their main employer as an agency. Social Worker numbers are covered in the response to question 3. There will be other registered social care staff who work with children e.g., domiciliary care workers and support staff.

This information, as with all information from the register, is entered and maintained by the individual when they register or in subsequent renewals. Registered individuals are encouraged to update their registration at the point of change occurring, but often this does not take place until the next registration renewal point. This does mean that there can be a lag in the data due to the time taken to update personal information by the Registered person.

Please be aware that individuals can hold multiple registrations and multiple places of employment, if they have more than one job. There will also be children's social care staff who are not required to register e.g., support staff.

Vacancy data is collected in our annual workforce data collection (no real time data is available for September 2023), this data collection goes to all providers across Wales and provides a snapshot of the social care workforce at a point in time. The full report¹ in 2022 reported the following.

¹ [Data and information on the social care workforce... | Social Care Wales](#)



3. As of September 2023, the total number of qualified social worker roles within the children’s social care workforce in Wales? (along with the vacancy rate and the percentage of agency staff)

We are able to provide figures as declared by the registered person. We have three categories in relation to social workers – those working in children’s services, those in adults’ services and those in all age teams².

As of September 2023, the register shows the total number of registered Social Workers in all categories in Wales was **6,736**. Of these, there were **775** social workers registered with an employment agency as their primary employer. This means that **11.5%** of all registered social workers in Wales identified an employment agency as their primary employer. It is important to note that not all social workers will be case holding and working directly with children. Our annual report 2022 suggested that there were 4,181 ‘front-line’ case holding social workers.

As of September 2023, the register shows the total number of Childrens Services Social Workers was **2,456**. Of these, **429 (17.5%)** declared their primary employer as an agency.

² An all age service is one where the registered worker works in a role that provides services to all ages, not just children or adults. While the combined group will include many case holding social workers, many of the workers registered in this category will not be case-holding social workers but employed in roles such as trainers, planners, commissioners etc

Total number of all age team Social Workers was **2,537** of these **142 (5.6%)** declare their primary employer as an agency.

This information, as with all information from the register, is entered and maintained by the individual when they register or in subsequent renewals. Registered individuals are encouraged to update their registration at the point of change occurring, but often this does not take place until the next registration renewal point. This does mean that there can be a lag in the data due to the time taken to update information. Individuals can hold multiple registrations and multiple places of employment.

The work that ADSS Cymru is currently undertaking through the Memorandum of Cooperation will hopefully provide more near-real-time data on vacancies and agency workers within Local Authority Children Services over the next few months.

4. Whose responsibility is it to collect and publish data on vacancy rates and use of agency staff in children's social care?

Understanding the social care workforce in Wales is a collective effort. [Since 2020, Social Care Wales has had the responsibility](#) to collect and [publish data](#) on the entirety of the social care workforce in Wales as part of Welsh Government's Performance and Improvement Framework for social services (PIF). The collection of a single data collection on the social care workforce in Wales was seen as a step forward from the multitude of disparate collections that existed prior to the introduction of the PIF. Social Care Wales is currently working on their third report in this framework.

The annual workforce data collection provides a benchmark of data in a national context. It was developed as a census tool to establish a single mechanism that could provide the necessary insight into the entirety of the social care workforce in Wales, not just registered professionals. It collects data from over 1,200 providers and tens of thousands of individuals who work in social care in Wales with the resulting report available to everyone.

The annual workforce data collection collects information about agency work but was designed as a system for producing annual statistics. The collection was never designed as a system that would be able to actively monitor the social care workforce in Wales in real time. The highly dispersed nature of delivery of social care by many organisations means that no single system exists to collect information on human resources outside of that used in the business themselves. This means that collecting the data is currently a very complex and time intensive task with real-time or near real-time data therefore relatively difficult to produce.

More frequent monitoring of vacancies, agency rates and workforce characteristics relies on employer data and local intelligence, or collective agreement through organisations such as ADSSC to produce data that is frequent and sharable, e.g., the memorandum of cooperation on agency social workers in children services.

Social Care Wales has also been considering how to publish data more actively on registered care workers. We hold information on registered individual's employer and can therefore monitor the number of those registered with an employment agency as their primary employer. This data is reliant on registered people keeping their record up to date and can only report information about their employer, and the role they are registered as. It is, however, another set of data that is being made available for use on the Social Care Wales data portal³. The data portal is a project to bring together data and intelligence on social care in Wales and is currently in the process of redevelopment by Social Care Wales.

In addition, we are in the process of summarising the workforce profile for the social work profession, using current registration data which we would happily share with you when available. While this will not be real time data, it will be a more recent capture of data from the register that can provide an overall profile of the profession. It will also lend itself to more effective workforce planning, by providing some projections of supply and demand of qualified social workers based on turnover, vacancy rates and data emerging from the qualifying pathways of newly qualified social workers from Welsh universities.

Directors of Social Services have a statutory role in each Local Authority to plan their workforce requirements to meet population needs and this is increasingly planned with the NHS and other partners via Regional Workforce Partnership boards, in the planning of more integrated services. Approaches to workforce planning in health and social care are improving but, as always, reliant on accurate, robust workforce data.

The ambition of the Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy remains clear in this respect of continually improving workforce data to aid effective workforce planning. There are specific actions in the draft delivery plan for social care that will support further improvement in this area during phase two of the strategy's implementation.

5. The frequency with which this data is collected.

Workforce data from all 1,200 social care services in Wales is currently collected on an annual basis by Social Care Wales and published as a summary report.

Registration data is updated continuously, but there are periods where updates are more frequent (at the end of a registration and renewal period for example) and as mentioned previously is reliant on the registered person updating their record on a regular basis.

Welsh Government collects some local authority workforce data on a more frequent basis (covering workforce capacity and absence). All other social care collections are ad-hoc and are gathered at the frequency agreed by the involved parties or as a one-off.

³ National social care data portal for Wales - <https://www.socialcaredata.wales/>

6. Your views as to the merits of publishing annual data as in England and which agency would be responsible for taking that forward:

As part of the Welsh Government's Performance and Improvement Framework for social services (PIF) Social Care Wales is already required to collect workforce data on an annual basis and a summary report is published accordingly.

This allows trends to be established based on reliable data and to a certain extent can be validated using comparative data from the register, which is the approach currently taken prior to publication. This revised process has been in place for three years and improvements in the approach have been made year on year. The aim is to have a public facing dashboard on the data portal described in question 4. This will enable data to be used by services and settings to aid improvements to approaches to workforce planning. We work closely with other UK nations in informing our approach to workforce data collections, as well as the Office for National Statistics.

There is a range of social care data available on our data portal, which you may find useful – the National social care data portal for Wales
<https://www.socialcaredata.wales/>

Llamau Submission to the Finance Committee:

Welsh Government Draft Budget proposals for 2024-25

Introduction

Homelessness and housing support services in Wales are facing significant pressures. Demand for Llamau's services has increased substantially, and we are seeing a considerable increase in the number of young people we support who are presenting with very complex support needs. Our funding is for 'Housing Related Support', yet we must provide so much more than that, which simply isn't factored in – or paid for - in existing contracts. In some cases, it is this work which is literally keeping people with a history of serious self-harm, or suicide attempts, alive.

The cost of delivering services has increased significantly, despite there being no increases to the Housing Support Grant (HSG). Many of our contracts are paid between 20% and 30% less than the real cost for funding these services, as they did not take account of the hike in inflation. We are already subsidising low value contracts through our own charitable fundraising, but as individuals and businesses experience similar cost of living issues, this has become a much more challenging environment.

In addition, we are already being told by commissioners that early intervention, prevention, and floating support services are under threat as they focus efforts on crisis services. Welsh Government has put a welcome emphasis on the importance of early intervention to achieve the ambition of making homelessness rare, brief and unrepeated, but once these services are lost, the sector will simply not be able to meet the aims of the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.

Increase in demand for services:

Our Youth Homelessness Helpline received the highest number of calls last month, a 50% increase on previous months, highlighting both the increase in numbers of young people in crisis and the importance of early identification, prevention and intervention services.

Referrals have continued to increase for refuge spaces across Llamau, with 279 referrals for our 64 spaces in 2022/23 (an increase of 114 or 69% from last year). During this year we increased capacity by opening 2 dispersed refuges (in Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council area). Demand for spaces meant we were unable to accommodate 90 referrals as refuges were full, and a further 16 were unable to be supported in the space that was available due to their support needs and/or family size.

In the community, our Floating Support services received 475 referrals, an increase of 20% compared to the previous year.

Staff wellbeing and retention:

Recruitment and retention of staff across the sector is extremely difficult. People are leaving for less stressful and higher paid roles elsewhere. This has significantly impacted on our ability to recruit and retain staff. In the last year, we have had to use agency workers to cover vacancies for the first time. The costs of doing this are very high compared with salaried staff and, given the increased demand across all support providers, it is a very competitive market.

National Living Wage increases are not included in our contracted funding, so we are expected to find the money from elsewhere. Whilst we welcome the increase for colleagues, we have no additional funding to pay for it. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, our lowest paid staff are now experiencing the same issues as the people we support, such as inability to pay bills, afford food shops, or pay rent.

This situation is unsustainable. Care services were given funding in last year's budget round to deliver Real Living Wage salaries for staff, but this did not happen for support services. Flat line budgets have led to wage deflation, and this is the primary cause of the recruitment and retention issue in the sector.

The Welsh Government's approach to preventative spending represented in resource allocations (Preventative spending = spending which focuses on preventing problems and eases future demand on services by intervening early).

The sector is being told by commissioners that prevention services are at risk as they need to concentrate funding on crisis interventions due to lack of funding. This is, in our view, a false economy as the preventative and early intervention services save money in the longer term, as these examples show:

- Mediation can sustainably prevent family relationship breakdown and the costly crisis of homelessness for a young person; saving over £27,000 per person in specialist supported accommodation costs.
- Family relationship breakdown is consistently shown to be the main driver of youth homelessness. Targeted early intervention like our mediation services can successfully enable young people to remain safely in their family home; preventing the significant costs of often inappropriate temporary accommodation – shown to have doubled in Wales in the last 5 years to over £40m.
- Supporting an individual to better manage their mental health through our specialist services such as counselling has a profound impact on their happiness and quality of life. Nearly £5 billion is lost through reduced productivity and healthcare costs in Wales annually.

- By facilitating re-engagement with education and preventing exclusion, our EMPHASIS outreach services can save the state an estimated £370,000 in lifetime education, benefits, healthcare, and criminal justice costs.

Is the support provided by the Welsh Government for third sector organisations, which face increased demand for services as a consequence of the cost-of-living crisis and the pandemic, sufficient?

Exiting the pandemic, we have seen an increase in complexity of needs and risk for the young people we are supporting, with greater experience of trauma and associated mental health and well-being needs. This is at a time when support from other agencies is more difficult to access.

The number of women facing homelessness because of domestic abuse is rising. However, there has also been a slowdown of availability of move on properties for women and families due to unprecedented demand for accommodation, and more general homelessness pressures.

The cost-of-living crisis has only exacerbated the problem, yet funding is not keeping pace with the rising demand for support services.

Conclusion

Llamau has always strived to deliver high-quality, effective support services, but it is difficult to see how services can be maintained at the current level without an increase in funding via the HSG. This is turn will see many more people unable to access the support they need in a timely manner.

The whole sector is struggling with increased demand, the complexity of needs and a lack of funding. Llamau, along with other support providers, has decided not to re-tender for some services as they simply can't be delivered to the standard needed with the funding available. There is nowhere left to go in terms of cost savings.

Without an uplift to the Housing Support Grant for the financial year 2024/25, there is a real risk of services collapsing, the early intervention agenda being lost – and with it, the opportunity to deliver the once in a generation change which the Welsh Government outlined in the White Paper on Ending Homelessness in Wales.

Agenda Item 5.6



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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

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

1 December 2023

Dear Jayne

Free School Meals Holiday Provision

Thank you for your letter of 25 October sharing your concerns on the provision of free school meals during the school holidays, as raised at the Children, Young People and Education Committee meeting on 14 September. I am aware of the letter you mention from the nine charities and responded to the letter in August this year.

A decision was taken in March 2023 to extend the holiday free school meal provision until the end of the May half-term holiday 2023. It was clear that this extension was all that could be afforded by the Welsh Government, even with the impact for families over the summer holidays being well understood.

Prior to the summer holidays, we wrote to LAs to encourage them to signpost families to all the local provision available to them; including summer schemes and provision provided by third sector and voluntary organisations. During the summer, a wide range of schemes were made available in each local authority area to support children and young people.

The Welsh Government funded School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP), branded as the ['Food and Fun scheme'](#), is school based and operates during the summer holiday period. During Summer 2023, a total of 265 schools participated in 175 SHEP schemes providing 11,100 places to learners per operating day. Schemes ran for a minimum of 12 days across all 22 local authorities. In addition, in response to the cost-of-living crisis, during this Summer, the majority of local authorities offered learners attending schemes a 'bag bwyd' (a bag containing pantry staples) to take home. Actual figures relating to levels of participation will be available later in the Autumn following submission of data from local authorities to the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) which manages SHEP.

The £1m Playworks Holiday Project was established to tackle holiday hunger by providing free healthy food / snacks at play schemes during the school holiday periods with the option of increasing existing holiday play provision. The funding is split by formula between the 22 local authorities. The scheme targets areas of deprivation, and can operate in each school holiday period, at the discretion of local authorities in line with the priorities identified in their Play Sufficiency Assessment.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Jeremy.Miles@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Jeremy.Miles@gov.wales

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.

We are aware during the 2023 summer holiday period, five Local Authorities provided a form of Free School Meal provision to eligible learners during the six week break. However, we do not hold data on the provisions not funded by Welsh Government

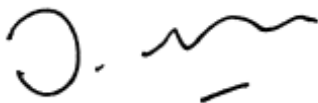
I recently considered whether to reinstate funding for holiday free school meal provision for October half term and subsequent school holidays. Unfortunately, due to the significant financial pressures facing the Welsh budget, provision of free school meals during the holidays has ceased indefinitely.

We are doing everything we can to support people with the cost-of-living crisis by providing targeted help to those who need it the most and through programmes and schemes which put money back in people's pockets. This includes information on [what is available in their local area](#) as well as [resources to help with the cost of living](#). During 2022-23 and 2023-24 we have invested more than £3.3bn in programmes and schemes which put money back into people's pockets.

We will continue to monitor the situation around the cost of living to support families and ensure we meet our commitment that no child goes hungry.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a circular initial followed by a stylized, wavy line.

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

