

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 29 January 2025	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.15	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Hybrid

Private pre-meeting

09.00 – 09.15

Public meeting

09.15 – 11.20

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.15

2 Routes into post-16 education and training – evidence session 1

09.15 – 10.15 (Pages 1 – 32)

Sion Amlyn, Policy and Casework Official The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) [via zoom]

Ioan Rhys Jones, General Secretary, Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Mary van den Heuvel, Senior Wales Policy Officer, National Education Union Cymru (NEU)

Attached Documents:

Research brief

Paper 1 NASUWT

Paper 2 UCAC (Translation)

Paper 3 NEU Cymru



3 Routes into post-16 education and training – evidence session 2

10.20 – 11.05

(Pages 33 – 38)

Deb Austin, Parent [via zoom]

Karen Berell, Parent

Attached Documents:

Paper 4 – Response from Parent

RET 08 Parent (Private)

RET 09 Individual (Private)

4 Papers to note

11.05

4.1 General scrutiny of the Cabinet Secretary for Education

(Pages 39 – 40)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Education

4.2 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 41 – 42)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Minister for Children and Social Care

4.3 Review of the Public Bill and Member Bill processes

(Pages 43 – 46)

Attached Documents:

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

4.4 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025–26

(Page 47)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

4.5 Disability and Employment

(Pages 48 – 63)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee from the
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Minister for Further and Higher
Education

4.6 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025–26

(Pages 64 – 67)

Attached Documents:

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

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

11.05

6 Routes into post–16 education and training – consideration of the evidence

11.05 – 11.15

Break

11.15 – 11.25

7 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025–26 – consideration of the draft report

11.25 – 12.30

(Pages 68 – 120)

Attached Documents:

Draft Report

Document is Restricted

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 04

Ymateb gan: NASUWT

Response from: NASUWT

Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options (vocational and academic routes post 16, i.e. further education, sixth form, apprenticeships and training, and onward to higher education)

- Quality and nature of information provided to learners within schools and those educated other than at school (EOTAS).

Quality and nature of information provided to learners is varied as it depends on the nature of that school.

It is also hard to judge the quality as this intimately linked with specific pupil stated wished for outcomes. Without this level of data, and a comparison with achievements post leaving FEI, assessment of quality is almost impossible.

If a pupil elicits appropriate Career Advice, then the provision locally must be accessible in order for the information to be appropriate and relevant.

Schools with 6th forms will predominantly promote their own subjects over FE establishments so as to retain learners and therefore retain the associated finance and prestige. Although Welsh Government policy is for a coordinated systems approach the individualistic needs of settings will influence the advice offered – we have no analysis of the advice given and how this relates to pupil need, or to the interests of the setting.

Recent budget cuts to schools does mean that schools are unable to offer a wide range of 6th form courses by themselves and so will promote a cooperation mode with nearby schools. This model should enable a wider range of subjects to be offered for a wider pupil cohort, across a group of schools. This model also relies on strong trust between schools, as well pupils ability and willingness to commute between schools or FEIs.

	<p>Schools with an older cohort 11-16 schools will provide more wide-ranging information about nearby schools and FE establishments. There is a question as to when consideration of future career options should begin in schools, and consideration at a younger age may bring benefits to life outcomes and achievements.</p> <p>There are partnerships between schools and different FE providers – here competition will influence the courses on offer, as does rural/regional provision.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality and nature of information provided directly to learners by Careers Wales. 	<p>This is particularly important to address inequalities and inequities e.g. a pupil from working class background may be unaware of other career options, or a refugee recently given leave to remain may not understand how the pathway to learning can be navigated.</p> <p>It is vital to ensure that these are individual advice sessions, as pupils will not share personal information in front of their peers.</p> <p>Also worth noting that for pupils with ALN these Careers Advice sessions operate in the same way as a therapy intervention.</p> <p>No data on the quality of these sessions.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which further education colleges are able to engage directly with learners in schools. 	<p>FE establishments will engage with schools – either via timetabled sessions or attendance at Yr.11 parents or careers evenings. The extent that this occurs will vary according to local demography, relationships between establishments and availability.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which learners in schools are made aware of the options available to them in school sixth forms and local further education colleges, and how closely schools engage with local colleges. Are there any conflicts of interest between sixth forms and further education colleges and is this more prevalent in some areas of Wales more than others? 	<p>Schools with 6th forms will predominantly and understandably promote their own subjects over FE establishments so as to retain learners and therefore retain the associated finance, prestige and job security.</p> <p>Recent budget cuts to schools may mean that schools are unable to offer a wide range of 6th form courses by themselves, and so will cooperate with nearby schools so that they all as a group of schools between them offer a wide range of 6th form subjects, with learners commuting between</p>

	<p>the schools. This is prevalent in rural areas and small schools.</p> <p>Competition for funds can create conflicts of interest.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which employers are able to engage directly with learners in schools, for example at careers events. 	<p>There is some solid partnership work taking place in some areas. In rural areas in particular the employer engagement can rely on local contacts.</p> <p>There is stronger reference to employer and FEIs working in partnership, with employers making presentations to learners as part of their course work, as well as offering work experience, and apprenticeships.</p> <p>Learners/parents experiencing ALN needs state that they are not meaningfully engaged with in relation to career opportunities.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who else influences learners future career choices (e.g. parents, teachers, peers), and how well are those people supported to do this. 	<p>Future career choices tend to be based on the positive experiences the learners have within that school (KS4 / 6th Form) as well as the influence of parents, peers and social media.</p> <p>There is evidence to show that a good Careers Advice session, one to one and personalised, can create an impact on future education choices. This can address a trajectory of a lack of social mobility by increasing the knowledge of different career paths available.</p>
<p>How effective careers support is at compulsory school age</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whether work experience opportunities for learners of compulsory school are operational, effective and meaningful and any barriers in that regard. 	<p>Work experience opportunities are effective and meaningful and are planned with the learner's needs in mind. The range of work experience opportunities varies across the country, with rural areas having limited availability as well as a narrower range of experiences than populous, industrialised areas. In such cases, some learners may seek work experience further afield – for example in England, and this can cause logistical problems for the parent school in terms of overseeing the location and the process.</p> <p>Cross border work experience also raises issues of portability of qualifications. Wales has extensive borders with England. The complexity of post 16</p>

	qualifications within and between countries is a barrier with which employers must engage.
☒ Changes in routes post-18	
☒ Welsh-medium provision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The availability of post-16 options (both academic and vocational) through the medium of Welsh, and how these impacts on young people's choices. 	<p>There is a disparity in availability of post-16 through the medium of Welsh and has historically been so. The availability of a range of post-16 courses in Welsh is dependent on staffing as well as the centre being able to budget for it. Financial constraints may see only English - medium post-16 subject classes being offered by schools, even though the learners attending may want to study in Welsh. Schools may make piecemeal arrangements to have material available in Welsh within these English-medium lessons, but this is a second-class arrangement.</p>
☒ Equity of access	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are some groups of learners disadvantaged by the current system (e.g. pupils from low-income households, learners with travel needs)? 	<p>Rural areas find travel a barrier to equity. In the days of all secondary schools having 6th forms, learners were serviced locally. With the reduction of 11-18 schools and the growth of centralised FE centres or tertiary colleges, rural areas are finding that equitable provision has travel commitments associated with it. Many rural areas have no immediate public transport links and are dependent on taxis or personal arrangements. This may then affect low-income households where the travel element is not picked up by the local authority or the FE establishment. Whilst there has been the same centralisation of post-16 education into FE and tertiary centres in the populous areas as well, the transport infrastructure is significantly better in these areas such that it mitigates the issue of traveling notable distances.</p> <p>The provision for ALN pupils is very mixed and haphazard. There is an assumption within the ALNnet similar to the provision for pre 16 school-pupils.</p> <p>The assumption that the FE/HE institution can provide for the ALN needs of pupils transitioning there takes no account of the individual and specific needs, nor do FEIs have the funds to cover these specific personal ALN needs.</p>

	<p>There is no specific statutory responsibility (apart from the general one of working in partnership) on health in regard to contributions to the IDP. As with school provision in this area, and LA IDP is needed to engage with provision from health and social care.</p> <p>The process of gaining funding for needed provision is pressured and subject to downgrading due to reducing resources.</p> <p>There is also confusion from some parents/ALN pupils as to how individual grants are obtained – this previously was managed by the WG as the lead provider.</p> <p>The confusion in sources of provision could well lead to an increase in Education Tribunal claims.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there any regional variation in the information and support provided about post-16 across Wales? Are there any particular challenges facing learners in rural areas? 	See above
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any other equality issues? 	See above
<p>Post-16 destination data</p>	
<p>Welsh Government's role</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective is the Welsh Government's approach to support participation in the full range of post-16 education and training options? 	<p>Parents of post 16 learners living with ALN state that they felt better supported when their ALN funding was centrally managed by the Welsh Government.</p> <p>This group states this is a continued role for Welsh Government, such a role would reduce confusion in how partners (LA, LHB, and FEI) share the costs of provision or specific needs of post 16 ALN learners.</p>

This document provides a translation of correspondence received from Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Llwybrau at addysg a hyfforddiant ôl-16](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 03

Ymateb gan: Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAU)

Response from: Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC)

PATHWAYS TO POST-16 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

UCAC WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE (in preparation for the presentation of oral evidence on 29 January 2025)

1. The quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options (post-16 vocational and academic pathways; that is, further education, sixth form, apprenticeships and training, and on to higher education)

1.1 Schools are committed to presenting detailed information to learners about the various options offered post-16. On the whole, learners have information in the form of a prospectus, presentations at school (eg in assemblies), open evenings/careers evenings. Pupils can get more information about the options available to them at college open evenings, chats with Careers Wales advisers, various sessions in school assemblies or PSHE lessons. Some schools' practice is to ensure that open evenings include representatives from various relevant organisations. One of the challenges, however, is the fact that institutions are 'competing' for learners and the future of some courses is at stake due to a lack of learners. As such, institutions are very keen to attract learners to their institutions. Getting learners to study courses is vital in order to retain staff and the courses themselves. Considering this, it is only natural that schools tend to focus on the courses that they have to offer, and that colleges act in the same way. Despite this, it must be recognised that teachers and schools see the importance of pupils' well-being when advising them about options.

1.2 It must also be noted that the relationship between colleges and schools varies. One obstacle to greater collaboration between colleges and schools is the lack of courses through the medium of Welsh in colleges. In addition, some learners are keen to go to further education colleges, because they have the perception that there is more 'freedom' in colleges, but on the other hand some learners want to stay in school, because they

know their teachers and because they feel safe at school. It must be emphasised how important sixth forms are to schools and the valuable experiences that pupils gain within them. It must also be remembered that schools now rely heavily on partnerships in the sixth form. In rural areas, learners' options are very limited – there are no further education colleges within reasonable travelling distance.

1.3 It is important that parents and stakeholders get the information about options and they are usually invited to options evening and careers evenings in schools and colleges. Local employers can contact schools and colleges to share information about any vacancies and they can also have a stand at careers evenings. There is an effort to include all stakeholders in relevant events and to share information with those who will help the learners to make choices. It is important to ensure that parents and employers and all those who are not involved in the field of education are fully aware of any developments in the that field, especially in terms of qualifications and opportunities. Perhaps more needs to be done to share this information and ensure there is a secure understanding of traditional courses, vocational opportunities and less traditional courses.

2. How effective is the careers support given to young people of compulsory school age?

2.1 There are examples of effective careers support, but cuts are affecting services. It is important that learners are aware of career paths from a very young age. In order to reduce numbers not in education, employment or training, individual learners must be targeted. In order to be able to do so, schools must have the appropriate capacity and resources. Ideally, careers advisers and teachers should be discussing pupils and have the opportunity to consider the pathways that would be most appropriate for them.

2.2 It is also important to ensure that some pathways are not considered as having higher status than others and it must be ensured that individuals' ambition is compatible with their ability and interests.

2.3 In some areas there is good collaboration between further education colleges and schools, but in others there is quite a bit of competition between them. For some pupils, the courses that they would like to follow are in further education colleges which are far from their homes and they give up courses because of the burden of daily travel. There are certainly no equal opportunities for learners in terms of post-16 education.

2.4 Having a period of work experience can be very valuable for pupils, but the opportunities have decreased recently. Some challenges have arisen in terms of insurance, health and safety and the level of accountability placed on schools. This is a great shame and has been a great loss for young people.

2.5 Opportunities need to be expanded and it must be ensured that genuine and valuable work experience is available to all, which matches the learner's aspirations and interests. It is important that careful consideration is given to the work experience. Schools should not have to bear the burden of arranging insurance etc for these experiences for learners. Schools do not have the capacity to do this.

3. Changes to post-18 pathways

3.1 Some young people are worried about debts as a result of higher education. It must be ensured that learners are aware of apprenticeships and courses where they can study hand in hand with earning a salary.

4. Welsh-medium provision

4.1 Post-16 Welsh-medium provision can be limited, for a variety of reasons:

- In rural areas and in small schools, the numbers who want to study individual subjects can be very small and as a result subjects are removed from the timetable
- In small dual stream schools (a Welsh stream and an English stream), there aren't enough learners that want to study the subject to be able to have a Welsh class and an English class. The result of this is that the classes are combined. Because English is the *lingua franca* of the group, linguistic progression slips and eventually everyone is studying the subject through the medium of English.
- There is little Welsh-medium provision in many further education colleges
- Sometimes it is a challenge to get staff to deliver courses through the medium of Welsh. This situation is a vicious circle – without staff to deliver courses through the medium of Welsh, there is less training through the medium of Welsh, which leads to a lack of specialist staff in a number of areas.

4.2 One of Medr's priorities is to 'encourage the provision of tertiary education through the medium of Welsh' and we hope to see progress in the Welsh medium courses provided. All pathways should be available through the medium of Welsh to all learners in Wales.

4.3 It is also important that free transport is available for learners who want to continue their post-16 education through the medium of Welsh.

4.4 It is interesting to note the finding of the Welsh Language Commissioner in the survey 'Compulsory education and the Welsh language'¹ – 'Opportunities

¹ Post-compulsory education and the Welsh language – the learners' voice, 17 November 2023 (Welsh Language Commissioner)

to study through the medium of Welsh are important for Welsh speakers when choosing a place of study, as well as opportunities to use Welsh as part of everyday life at school or college.' It is also clear that there is a lack of consistency in terms of Welsh-medium provision. The percentage of those who responded positively to the statement that there are enough opportunities to study through the medium of Welsh in their area varied quite a bit, with the results being summarised in the document, as follows, 'There is a clear lack of post-16 provision in several areas.'

5. Fair access

5.1 There needs to be a focus on transport for learners that want to continue their education through the medium of Welsh. Learners shouldn't have to pay for transport in order to secure Welsh-medium provision.

5.2 The same opportunities should be available for all and they should not have to pay for a service in one area that is available for free in another.

5.3 The Welsh Language Commissioner's document on post-16 education² comes to the conclusion 'The lack of Welsh-medium provision, particularly in more vocational areas, is a difficulty that the post-16 sector needs to address.'

5.4 There must also be a focus on pupils whose parents have not followed a further education pathway. We need to nurture talents at a young age and create ambition and opportunities for all learners, whatever their ability.

5.5 Certainly, there are challenges for learners in rural areas – they have fewer choices, they face long journeys in order to access suitable courses and there aren't the same opportunities in terms of work experience either. Often, they have to travel a distance to go to school and the only further education colleges available for them are a long way from their homes. Some start studying courses and then give up because they can't cope with the daily travel.

5.6 It is also important to take into account learners with additional learning needs, and ensure that they have fair opportunities to continue with their education.

6. Post-16 destination data

6.1 It is important to gather data in order to further improve the provision. Post-school learner pathways must be tracked and follow them into the world of work. It is also must be known how many start various courses but give up before completing them. In addition to quantitative data, conversations with learners are needed in order to collect qualitative data – which courses some would have

² Post-compulsory education and the Welsh language – the learners' voice, 17 November 2023 (Welsh Language Commissioner)

liked to have studied but couldn't, what are the reasons for not being able to study them etc.

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Llwybrau at addysg a hyfforddiant ôl-16](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 06

Ymateb gan: Undeb Addysg Cenedlaethol Cymru

Response from: National Education Union Cymru (NEU)

National Education Union (NEU) Cymru response

Background

NEU Cymru welcomes that the Children, Young People and Education Committee is looking into Routes into post-16 education. NEU Cymru are deeply concerned by the levels of participation amongst learners in post-16 in Wales, and believe it is critical that learners have a diverse range of options for post-16 learning.

NEU Cymru represents members across the post-16 sectors from lecturers to support staff in a range of settings, including Further Education and 6th Form provision. It is important to recognise that 6th Form provision is intrinsically linked to the education of learners within the secondary sector – and there will be both explicit and implicit advantages to attending a secondary school with a sixth form. Not least that the teachers will be able to support learners in terms of transition, especially in terms of preparedness for A levels, in terms of the syllabus.

From our members perspective it is highly important that Welsh Government supports tackling any barriers there are for people who want to attend post-16 provision – which can include transport, funding, and support available.

Participation in post-16

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) ran an analysis of post-16 across the UK. We are deeply concerned that levels of participation at post-16 in Wales are lower in Wales, with high levels of young people classed as Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). As the EPI report¹ says:

“Higher share of pupils ‘Not in Education, Employment or Training’ (NEET) in Wales. Nearly 11 per cent of young people aged 16-18 in Wales were classified as NEET in 2022-23, compared with 8 per

¹ <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/UK-Nations-post-16-Report-1-FINAL.pdf>

cent in England, 9 per cent in Scotland and 5 per cent in Northern Ireland. We also see a bigger recent rise in Wales, with NEET rates for this age group up from 6 per cent in 2021-22.”

Whilst according to Welsh Government data this figure has shown a stark decline in the last recorded 12 months (down to 5.4%²), the statistical analysis warns against short term conclusions, due to the size of the data sample.

This highlights the need for better data in the post-16 sector, and we would welcome WG producing better insight into the post-16 landscape.

Disadvantaged Groups

Poverty

For people living in poverty, there can be multiple barriers to accessing education. There are certainly some anomalies within the system which need to be addressed, which further disadvantage some learners.

For example, access to transport to attend FE can vary between colleges, and should be free to all. Free School Meals are available for young people who attend a school sixth form (and are eligible), but not for those in FE. We do welcome that the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is available for learners in Wales – but we really don't think this should be spent on expensive transport.

The EMA is critical for many learners, in supporting their decision to stay on in post-16. Some courses, such as the more vocational ones, can be more expensive in terms of materials needed. Students should be enabled to study the course which is right for them and not restrained by cost, which includes purchasing equipment.

Age

It is worth noting, young people aged 24 are most likely not to be classed as NEET – indeed the WG figures state that 20%³ of them were NEET when the data was last analysed. Although we cannot know the specific cause of this figure, it is worrying and should give cause for alarm.

² <https://www.gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-july-2023-june-2024-html>

³ <https://www.gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-july-2023-june-2024-html>

This clearly highlights the need for greater support for adult learning in the sector and for the need to ensure that young people are enabled to enter the education system as and when they need to. We would be concerned about young people leaving school to enter highly insecure and low paid work, only to find that they find it harder to enter back into the education system.

Disabled young people

The figures for disabled people are truly alarming, with nearly 40% of them aged 19-24 classed as NEET:

“In the three-year period ending June 2024, the proportion of disabled people who are NEET rises from 17.9% at age 16 to 18, to 38.7% at age 19 to 24.”

This shocking figure coincides with the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs and Tribunals (Wales) Act, which aimed to give more integrated support to learners in post-16 – focusing on transition. However, these figures reflect a failure to support disabled young people as they leave compulsory school age.

Our members tell us that there are also increasing expectations of them as lecturers as more young people are expected to attend mainstream settings. It is our belief that disabled young people deserve better than these figures, and that their needs in terms of education and employment must be supported.

Funding

Funding within post-16 has meant many changes in recent years, and we are yet to see the full meaning of the Medr for the post-16 sector.

Funding for the sector has seen many challenges, and it is important to recognise how varied it is in terms of provision.

Reorganisation of the sector

NEU Cymru are yet to see how the reorganisation of the sector through the creation of the Medr would look like. During the passage of the legislation to create the Medr, we worked with the other trade unions to ensure there is a strategic duty for Medr to “promote partnership between tertiary education providers and their recognised trade unions”.

We are disappointed that the Medr has had minimal engagement with us as a trade union to date, and are especially disappointed that the

Cabinet Secretary did not decide to expand the representation of associate union members on the board to include those who represent the teaching workforce.

If Medr's assertion that there are no schools, just providers, within the post-16 sector, there should be efforts made to reach out to those different types of trade unions who represent the workforce in different types of providers.

Furthermore, on the reorganisation, we will be responding to the Welsh Government's current consultation on the School's Organisational Code, to ensure they are enacting promises made during the passage of legislation, to ensure that any decisions to close school sixth forms will go to the Minister, if there is a complaint in writing.

Careers Support

Careers Wales used to have a more substantial role supporting learners to access work experience – our members believe it should be their role, and not that of a school, to find local opportunities for learners.

Professional learning is critical for education professionals working in this area, and they should be enabled to support carer and work-related learning. Fundamental to this is the need for young people to have access to learning about trade unions, and their role.

We are concerned that young people access insecure and low paid roles on leaving education, without the knowledge to equip them for the workplace. Indeed, it is important that Careers Wales should have a role in helping support young people to find employment which suits their skills but also is secure and has access to recognised trade unions.

Schools and colleges working together

NEU Cymru recognises that there is effectively a market for learners in the post-16 sector in Wales. This model does not encourage collaborative working.

It is our belief that different learners at post-16 will thrive best in different settings. We believe each learner should have access to the full range of vocational and academic options and be enabled to attend which one works for them.

This sector must be about enabling learners to participate and ensuring that courses fit individual learners. Any review of post-16 education must

ensure that qualifications do not have the look and feel of those which are exams based.

It is worth asking the question about compulsory post-16 education, as Wales is an outlier on this, compared to the other UK nations. Should learners in Wales have to attend education until they are 18, and would this help ensure fewer NEETs, and great opportunities for further progression within education?

Qualifications

NEU Cymru would like Wales to take this opportunity to ensure that learners in post-16 have access to the full range of qualifications and that there is clear parity of esteem between vocational and academic qualifications – enabling them to progress to the next stage of life .

For young people re-sitting qualifications, it is important that these qualifications are as accessible as possible, relying on a mix of assessment methods, including teacher assessment.

We are concerned that planned changes to GCSEs increasingly look and feel like they are exam focused, through the over-use of in-classroom timed assessments, which can narrow the curriculum, and create extra workload for education professionals.

The qualifications offer in post-16 must be wide, and support learners to thrive in a range of subjects. We would question arguments around so-called ‘duplication’, as courses are not the only reason young people choose their options for post-16.

Welsh Language

We would agree there are sometimes more limited choices for learners through the medium of Welsh. We are clear that a workforce plan is needed to ensure that the workforce has the opportunity to learn Welsh to a level at which they are confident enough to teach.

We surveyed our members in Wales on the White Paper proposals in 2023, and asked respondents to place themselves in one of seven Welsh speaking categories, e.g. I am a confident, but not fluent, Welsh speaker, and would like more support to be confident enough to teach through the medium of Welsh. Fifty-five per cent (55%) of respondents who either speak a lot of Welsh, are confident, or fluent Welsh speakers said they’d like more support to be confident enough to teach through the medium of Welsh.

Welsh-medium sixth forms are an essential component in the Cymraeg 2050 strategy. They not only deepen and embed Welsh-language skills, but they are also a vital link towards career pathways in various sectors where Welsh-speakers are very much in demand, including the health and education workforces.

For more information contact:
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Agenda Item 3

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Llwybrau at addysg a hyfforddiant ôl-16](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 08

Ymateb gan: Rhiant

Response from: Parent

Statement for parents Voices in Wales

Xxxxxx xxxxx, Parent of a neurodivergent 15 year old.

My daughter is now at the point where she will be transitioning from school in the near future. It's a difficult time because her options should be wide, but in reality, they are limited.

There is lots of information about the options available. Everyone wants to "sell" you these in lovely brochures and on websites, but what is less clear is how young people with ALN are supported in post 16 options. As a parent and a young person it's hard to find good information on this. Careers Wales input is limited to signposting and resources, such as personality profiling, and their input appears to very much be controlled by ALNCo's, who may or may not invite them to meetings about your child's future.

I have two children who attend the same Welsh medium school. One has an ALN, the other doesn't. Very different conversations happen around post 16 education. There seems to be little aspiration or expectation that my ALN daughter will go on to higher education, but my son is pushed towards Russel Group Universities. With the right support, I believe she would be able to gain a degree, but I don't think my view is supported by her school. This disappoints me because it feels they have already limited her post 16 options. Their aspirations for her are low. I think that's common with ALN children, even though they have so much potential.

Even with regards to employment, there have been no opportunities for work place visits, work experience and no businesses coming in to talk about work based opportunities such as internships or apprenticeships.

Better direct support and the development of flexible, needs led transition plans for young people is needed, as well as more options for direct work experience. Even if young people try a work experience and they do not like it, that's an important learning curve and can be used to recognise skills and target further opportunities. Projects like Engage to Change have shown that experience matters, and that young people can successfully transition into employment when the support is right. It is disappointing that this is no longer available.

My daughter needs an advocate to make sure her choice and voice is heard. Lack of opportunity outside of the classroom over the last few years due to Covid, has meant that her knowledge and experiences are limited. School has been difficult for her and not something she has enjoyed. She counts the days she has left there and is looking forward to moving on, but without good information it is hard for her to make an informed choice. Her equality of opportunity is not the same as her mainstream peers.

Looking to the future, she can work and will work, but will need support to find, learn and maintain a job. This will need to be needs led support, and much like school a whole-systems approach will need to be in place with the employer/ job support and family all having an understanding of what works best to support her. This is going to be hard to find and again, much like our experience of education, it will be a fight.

There are so many young people across Wales who are in the same position. We need statutory and further education to be better preparing young people for their adult lives. Careers Wales needs an overhaul and should be a more practical presence in school. Every school should have a qualified coach who can support young people with ALN to have work based experiences outside of the classroom. This will raise aspirations and confidence and allow young people to make better informed choices about the future they want to have.

Finally, the Welsh Government need to be speaking to young people with ALN directly. Their voices are the most important here.

Xxxxxx xxxxx, Parent.

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

Document is Restricted

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

Document is Restricted



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru

20 January 2025

Dear Chair,

Outcome of the UK Education Ministers' Council meeting

In accordance with the inter-institutional relations agreement, I am writing to inform you of the outcome of the fifth UK Education Ministers Council (EMC) meeting, which took place in Lisburn, Northern Ireland on the 20 November 2024.

As lead Cabinet Secretary for this Interministerial Group, I attended the meeting on behalf of the Welsh Government.

The meeting was chaired by Paul Givan MLA, Minister of Education for the Northern Ireland Executive. The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP represented the UK Government. Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills sent apologies on behalf of the Scottish Government. Officials from all four nations also attended.

The group were welcomed to Laurelhill Community College where they enjoyed a dress rehearsal of the annual school production. There were also opportunities to meet with students to discuss their experiences.

The theme of the meeting was Teacher Professional Learning and teacher recruitment and retention.

The Chair welcomed representatives from the four Initial Teacher Education institutions in Northern Ireland (Stranmillis and St. Mary's University Colleges, Queens University and Ulster University), who gave a presentation on the range of courses available, how the courses prepare students to support those with special educational needs, how students are prepared to use technology in their teaching careers and opportunities for post-graduate study.

This was followed by a discussion on Teacher Professional Learning around best practise and the various challenges experienced by all members in their jurisdiction.

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

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

The valuable contribution made by International Students across the UK was discussed, along with early childcare schemes with Northern Ireland and Wales highlighting the Childcare Subsidy Scheme and the Flying Start Scheme respectively.

It was agreed that the Welsh Government would host the next the next meeting. Officials will collaborate with their counterparts to set the theme and agenda.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne Neagle". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Dawn Bowden AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal
Cymdeithasol Minister of Children and
Social Care

Ein cyf/Our ref MA/DB/11094/24

Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

21 January 2025

Dear Buffy,

Today I have published a Written Statement on the first of two post implementation review reports on the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020.

The legislation requires that ‘the first report must be prepared as soon as practicable after the expiry of the period of 3 years beginning with the coming into force of section 1’ of the Act. Welsh Ministers must also, as soon as practicable after preparing a report, lay the report before the Senedd and publish the report’.

The Children, Young People and Education Committee played an integral role in the passing of this landmark legislation and in determining the parameters of the post implementation review. I wanted to take this opportunity to set out my intentions for the post implementation review report.

In March 2021, my predecessor, Julie Morgan MS, wrote to the then Chair of the Committee (a copy can be found here [Eich cyf](#) (Eng)/[Eich cyf](#) (Cym)) setting out the areas the review would cover which include:

- the impact on public services;
- awareness of the law and attitudes to physical punishment; and
- stakeholder views and experiences.

The letter also outlined plans for data collection and monitoring, based on the recommendations made the Data Collection and Monitoring (DCM) task and finish group.

We have a suite of data and research activity underway to support each element of the review, including:

- Survey results tracking awareness of the legislation and attitudes towards physical punishment of children (which will include the views of parents and children);
- Data collection and monitoring in relation to the impact on Public Services; and
- Qualitative research with practitioners to understand any ways in which the change in law has affected frontline delivery.

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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.

As set out in my Statement, the review will provide a synthesis of the available data and evidence gathered over the three-year period to consider the impact of the change in law.

Our intention is to include data from the Police; Social Services; Crown and Prosecution Service; and local authorities in relation to Out of Court disposal scheme. Due to the nature of the data and collection requirements, data will be made available to us at different points in the year. We also need to allow sufficient time for analyses and quality assurance of the data once received.

It is expected that the synthesis of data and evidence will be ongoing until Autumn this year and it is, therefore, my intention that the final report will be laid before the close of 2025.

I hope the Committee finds this information useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care

Senedd Committees

21 January 2025

Dear Chair,

Business Committee review of the Public Bill and Member Bill processes

The Business Committee is reviewing the Senedd's processes relating to Public Bills and Member Bills. We would like to hear your views on what is working well and what could be improved.

Annexed to this letter are the terms of reference for our work and a list of the areas of focus for our initial evidence gathering we have identified to date. We would welcome your views on the matters within our terms of reference which are relevant to your work, including, but not necessarily limited to, the areas of focus. If there are other matters of relevance to our terms of reference that you would like to raise in your evidence, please do so.

We would be grateful if you could provide your written evidence **by Friday 28 March 2025**. You can either send your submission to SeneddBusiness@senedd.wales or respond to specific questions on each of the areas of focus set out in the [online form](#) available as part of our [open consultation](#).

To ensure that anyone who would like to share their views about the legislative processes is able to do so, we have also issued an [open consultation](#). We would be grateful if you could share the consultation with your stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



The Rt Hon Elin Jones MS

Chair of the Business Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg. We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Annex: terms of reference and areas of focus for the initial evidence gathering phase

Public Bill process

Terms of reference

To explore options for improving the operation and effectiveness of the Senedd's scrutiny of Public Bills introduced in accordance with Standing Order 26, by reviewing experiences in the Sixth Senedd (and previous Seneddau where relevant), including:

- Relevant procedures, practices, conventions, culture and ways of working.
- The experience of legislating in a hybrid environment.

Areas of focus for the initial evidence gathering phase

- The overall effectiveness of the Senedd's consideration of Public Bills and opportunities for the public and stakeholders to contribute to the Senedd's scrutiny.
- The timetabling of Senedd scrutiny of Public Bills, including: the establishment of Bill timetables in accordance with SO26.7 (and the factors taken into account when timetables are established); and the timing of amendment tabling deadlines, the publication of Marshalled Lists/Groupings Lists and proceedings.
- The explanatory materials and information provided during the Public Bill scrutiny process, including: the requirements for Explanatory Memorandums specified in Standing Orders; the timing of written responses to Stage 1 committee reports; the provision and presentation of other information during scrutiny (such as Welsh Government-provided documents or Senedd Research publications); arrangements regarding explanatory text about the purpose and effect of amendments; and the availability, accessibility and clarity of the guidance available to Members and the public about the legislative process.
- How admissibility of amendments is assessed, and how amendments to Bills are debated and disposed of.
- How the Senedd is asked to agree to the financial consequences of Bills and amendments, including the movement of Financial Resolutions and whether it is sufficiently clear how 'significant' should be interpreted for the purposes of SO26.69-26.71.
- Whether the rules relating to the optional 'Further' amending stages are clear enough.



- The rules relating to emergency Bills.
- Whether the experience of legislating in a hybrid context, in which Members and others may participate virtually or in person, has had any impact on the Senedd's scrutiny of Public Bills.
- Any considerations for the Public Bill process arising from the increase from 60 to 96 Members in 2026 or the increase in the frequency of ordinary Senedd elections from every five years to every four years.

Member Bill process

Terms of reference

To explore options for improving the operation and effectiveness of the Senedd's Member Bill process, by:

- Reviewing experiences in the Sixth Senedd (and previous Seneddau where relevant), including relevant procedures, practices, conventions, culture and ways of working prior to a Member Bill's introduction (including but not limited to the way in which Members are selected for the opportunity to propose a Bill, the process for gaining 'leave to proceed', and the level of information Members are required to provide at these stages).
- Identifying any potential implications for the Member Bill process arising from the increase in the number of Members of the Senedd.
- Identifying and, where appropriate, raising with relevant decision-makers including the Senedd Commission and the Independent Remuneration Board of the Senedd, issues relating to the resource and support available to Members during the Member Bill process.

Areas of focus for the initial evidence gathering phase

- The overall effectiveness of the Member Bill process.
- How Members are selected for the opportunity to propose a Bill.
- How Members are granted leave to introduce Bills.
- The rules about what can, or cannot, be included in a Member Bill, i.e. the 'scope' of such Bills.

- Any considerations for the Member Bill process arising from the increase from 60 to 96 Members in 2026 or the increase in the frequency of ordinary Senedd elections from every five years to every four years.
- The implications of the above for the support and resources available to Members wanting to propose Bills.



**Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb
a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol**

**Equality and Social Justice
Committee**

Buffy Williams MS

Chair of the Children and Young People Committee

Dear Buffy,

January 15th 2025

Budget Scrutiny on Welsh Benefits Supporting Children

Before publication of the Draft Budget, the Bevan Foundation called for the Welsh Government to update the eligibility criteria and cash value of Welsh benefits in line with inflation. This includes the Education Maintenance Allowance, the School Essentials Grant and Free School Meals for pupils in secondary schools.

The Equality and Social Justice Committee asked the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice about updating these benefits during our Draft Budget evidence session on 13 January. The Cabinet Secretary responded that this was a matter for the Cabinet Secretary for Education. Due to time constraints we were unable to challenge this response, however we agreed to draw it to your attention.

In light of the relevance of these social justice issues, I would be grateful if the CYPE Committee would allow me to attend your budget scrutiny with the Cabinet Secretary for Education tomorrow in my capacity as Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee. I have the agenda and the Cabinet Secretary's supporting evidence and would be grateful with your agreement, if I might be able to ask a couple of questions.

Cofion cynnes,

Jenny Rathbone MS

Equality and Social Justice Committee

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Agenda Item 4.5

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Vikki Howells AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
Minister for Further and Higher Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Committee Chair - Equality and Social Justice Committee
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23 January 2025

Dear Jenny,

The Disability Employment Gap and the education system

Thank you for your letter concerning the enquiry into the disability employment gap in Wales. We have considered your queries and provided detailed responses below.

In addition to the detailed responses, we would like to emphasise our collective commitment to ensuring that all learners, including disabled learners, are supported as they progress through our education system into employment or self-employment opportunities.

By ensuring that inclusion and equity are fully embedded into our education system, we aim to improve outcomes for all learners. Systemic reforms to the education system are under way in Wales, including the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales and implementation of an Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system.

The [Curriculum for Wales](#) sees every learner as an individual with different strengths and areas for development and gives teachers more flexibility to teach in a way that best meets the individual needs of each child. Alongside the Curriculum for Wales, the ALN system helps ensure that where children and young people need additional learning provision to meet their ALN, they have that provision planned and protected in a statutory plan called an individual development plan (IDP).

The ALN system is replacing the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system and is underpinned by the ALN and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act and ALN Code for Wales. Further information on how education is changing in Wales and the ALN system can be found on the [Welsh Government website](#).

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

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

As young people progress through our education system, we have put in place the support required to enable them to progress into employment, including advice and guidance and specific employability and skills programmes.

[Stronger, Fairer, Greener - our Plan for Employability and Skills](#), published in March 2022 sets out how we are addressing economic inequality, including ensuring nobody is left behind. It sets out the steps we are taking to support people in Wales to navigate and respond to work-related challenges they may face. This includes support for their physical and mental health as well as opportunities for training, upskilling, seeking alternative career pathways or starting their own business.

We have also put in place a range of resources to help employers understand the social model of disability, support them with the recruitment and retention of disabled workers and learn about making reasonable workplace adjustments. This work is led by our team of Disabled People's Employment Champions (DPEC), all of whom have lived experience of being disabled or caring for disabled people. Further resources are also provided through [Business Wales](#) and their Disabled People's Employment Advisers.

You will be aware of the Disability Rights Taskforce, which has worked with disabled people with expertise, Disabled People's Organisations, and Welsh Government policy leads. Its purpose was to bring members together to address the challenges and barriers, which were identified in the Locked-Out Report <https://www.gov.wales/locked-out-liberating-disabled-peoples-lives-and-rights-wales-beyond-covid-19> and which impact many disabled people. The taskforce provided strategic oversight of ten working groups including Employment and Income, Children and Young People and Travel.

The Taskforce has worked with more than 350 external stakeholders and 200 policy leads and has been supported by the Welsh Government's Disability Disparity Evidence Unit and the Disabled Peoples Employment Champions. The recommendations of the taskforce are informing a cross-Government action plan, which will be consulted upon in the Spring. Building on this, we have provided a detailed response against each of the questions posed in your letter below:

- 1. The need to ensure equitable access to work placement opportunities and the need to work with employers to achieve this*

Every effort is made to ensure that young people have equitable access to work placement opportunities.

Through Careers Wales, we provide advice, guidance and support for young people, including those with a disability, to secure work opportunities - [Employment Support | Careers Wales](#).

In addition to supporting young people, our Disabled People's Employment Champions, employed by the Welsh Government, provide practical support to employers across Wales on employing disabled people. Disabled People's Employment Champions offer a free service for public and private sector employers across Wales.

The Champions, supported by Business Wales Disabled People's Employment Advisors, can provide advice and help on issues such as:

- Inclusive recruitment
- Financial support
- Practical advice on staff retention and reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- Ensuring Human Resources policies and workplaces are inclusive

- Promoting the Social Model of Disability
- Supporting employers to progress to Disability Confident leader status

Through Business Wales, we have also put in place support for employers to remove barriers to employment opportunities, more details of which are provided in the answers to your more detailed questions below.

2. *Your assessment of how the Careers Wales work experience scheme for learners in year 10 and 11 is able to support disabled learners? What data you can share with us regarding the proportion of those learners who are disabled?*

A school's curriculum offer in Years 10 and 11 must provide all learners, including disabled learners, with a broad and balanced learning and experiences. It should be designed with the 4 components of the [14 to 16 learner entitlement](#) in mind. Particularly, reflecting on learning and progress and post-16 planning; and wider learning and experiences across the curriculum. This should encompass all the learning and experiences that a learner encounters within their 14 to 16 journey.

This provides an opportunity for schools to provide more tailored and specific [careers and work-related experiences \(CWRE\)](#) within Years 10 and 11 to meet their learners needs. Effective CWRE comprises of age and developmentally appropriate careers education, supported by a wide range of relevant work-related learning experiences and environments. To help ensure learners are engaged in CWRE, schools and settings should have regard to a range of factors including additional learning needs.

Through the Renew and Reform project, which aimed to address the impact of Covid-19 on education and training, the Welsh Government asked Careers Wales (CW) to deliver a Tailored Work Experience (TWE) project, to help reengage year 10 and 11 learners with their GCSE studies so they could transition successfully onto the next stage of their education or training journey. From 2022 to 2024, Careers Wales received an additional £517,000 to work with 2 schools from each of the 22 local authorities in Wales to offer 500 TWE placements. By the end of March 2024 over 600 young people had taken part in a TWE placement.

For 2024/25, Welsh Government secured a further £250,000 for the TWE project, enabling the project to continue on a smaller scale. Careers Wales were asked to offer a further 250 placements for learners, across 5 clusters of Local Authorities. Careers Wales can identify 55 learners from their records who have been placed on a TWE placement and had a disability.

Careers Wales has a team of ALN advisers who work predominantly in special schools and resource bases. Careers Wales work with young people to help them understand their options, make good decisions about their future and support them to implement their plans.

Data

The Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2022/23 shows that Careers Wales supported 2,096 disabled young people in statutory education and 880 young people in 16-17 post statutory education (the 2023/24 report is due to be published this spring).

During 2023/24 Careers Wales provided 4,686 one-to-one interactions to young people who have a statement / statement equivalent or an individual development plan. As part of their ALN support Careers Wales also attended 3,612 transitional reviews with schools, providers, parents and young people to ensure a smooth transition.

The My Future section on the Careers Wales website supports young learners up to Level One with easy-to-read careers information. During 2023/24 this page was accessed by 6,600 users, also nine new videos were added to showcase different jobs including an animator, office worker and fitness instructor.

Careers Wales also publish annual reports, detailing progress towards their key performance indicators – the latest annual report can be found via the following link: [Our annual report | Careers Wales](#).

In addition, Careers Wales produce case studies that illustrate and highlight the impact of their work, including those with a disability. We have provided one such case study below:

Case study – Tailored Work Experience

Placement: Garage

X was referred to TWE as he was showing signs of disengagement at school. X wears a cochlear implant for his left ear and finds it hard to throw himself into school due to his hearing loss.

Since starting his placement X has increased his days and now attends twice a week. The garage is hugely supportive of X. X helps out over the holidays and receives high praise from the employer for his work ethic. X's low attendance at school has increased to 94% since attending TWE. The school reports 108 positives and 49 negative records and said that X attending TWE twice a week is a great outcome for him, he has grown in confidence when communicating with staff and his peers since starting TWE and is happier at school week.

X finds his placement really interesting and appreciates the trust the staff at the garage have in him to allow him to work on complicated jobs with them. He said he's learning to problem solve. X said it feels great to be good at something and feels happier and more confident since being on placement. The garage are immensely proud to have him at the garage and would love to offer him an opportunity when he finishes school.

3. *More broadly, your assessment of how the "Careers and work related experiences" (CWRE) part of the Curriculum for Wales and associated statutory guidance is supporting disabled learners.*

Effective Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) is comprised of age- and developmentally appropriate careers education embedded across the areas of learning and experience (Areas).

The guidance states that to help ensure that learners are engaged in CWRE, schools or settings should have regard to a range of factors such as learners' age, knowledge and additional learning needs. It also states that in order for practitioners to maximise the benefits of work-related experiences, it is useful to ensure that experiences are accessible to all learners and take into account their specific needs and interests.

The guidance builds on this and sets out that when considering work-related experiences, it is important for practitioners to challenge their own perspectives as well as those of learners, parents and carers, on issues such as workplace stereotypes. Labour market information enables learners to be aware of pay, roles and location.

Schools and settings should incorporate developmentally appropriate, impartial and current labour market information, at a local, regional and national level, to ensure CWRE provision is well designed to meet the needs of all learners.

Careers Wales CWRE support is available to all young people, (including those who have a disability) in mainstream and special schools. Careers Wales work in partnership with all mainstream secondary and special schools to agree and then organise bespoke events such as visits to employer premises or visits by employers to schools to provide a talk to learners.

Careers Wales also hold a series of regional 'What Next' career fairs for learners with ALN. The aim of these events is to highlight the employers and providers that can offer progression routes for these learners. Contributors at the events bring interactive and engaging activities that enable learners to 'have a go' at a range of careers related tasks to illustrate opportunities that might be open to them when they leave school. Feedback from learners, teachers and employers is always very positive. The Careers Wales Big Ideas Wales role model workshops are also offered to ALN learners.

Careers Wales have a number of resources available to support schools deliver CWRE, including:

- The CWRE toolkit, a resource to support all teachers, senior leadership teams and those supporting young people, to realise and embed CWRE in their schools and settings. The resource is made up of a toolkit and a toolbox which provides information and resources to support the development, implementation, and evaluation of careers education provision.
- The Careers Wales Quality Award which aims to support all schools and settings with learners aged 3 to 16, with the development of purposeful and relevant CWRE across the curriculum. The award is currently being piloted ready for 2026.

4. *The extent to which schools and other education settings are working with employers and third party organisations to provide high-quality enrichment experiences for learners, in line with Welsh Government's statutory guidance. What data can you share with us?*

Schools

The Curriculum for Wales, and particularly the opportunity to take a more individualised approach to learning and tailor their offer, is supporting our school leaders to increase equity and inclusivity for all our learners, including those with disabilities.

The Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance is a clear statement of what is important in delivering a broad and balanced education for all learners. It challenges schools to choose the specific experiences, knowledge, and skills that best support their learners, raising expectations. High quality learning experiences should promote learners' independence, offering challenge and the opportunity to experience success along their learning journey. These experiences should respect and value the uniqueness of every learner.

Careers Wales bring together schools and businesses, with the aim of informing, inspiring and motivating young people about their career opportunities. Careers Wales have the following offer:

- The Valued Partner Initiative which recognises sustainable relationships between employers and schools. CW provide additional support to help maintain and strengthen relationships and have widened the Valued Partner Initiative to include teacher employer encounters, to support teachers gain a better understanding of the current world of work.
- Up to 6 employer-led activities in each secondary school, PRU and special school. They are bespoke and based on Career Check data, LMI and the needs of the school. Activities include single employer events (presentations, site visits, mock interviews etc), multiple employer events (speed networking and carousel days), and specific curriculum enrichment input.
- The development of nine employer-led, sector-based challenges to embed CWRE. Careers Wales have developed the curriculum-related challenges in partnership with: Vishay (Compound Semi-Conductors) and Bryn Celynnog Comprehensive, Toyota (Advanced Manufacturing) and Ysgol Treffynnon and Starling Bank (Fintech) with Llangatwg Comprehensive. These challenges are currently being piloted before being made available to other schools in 2025. Further challenges are planned with, Digital Health and Care Wales, Celtic Group, Drop Bear Brewery and RWE Renewables.
- What Next? regional careers fairs for ALN learners.
- Access to an extensive library of employer videos.
- Supporting schools to develop alumni networks.
- Tailored Work Experience (TWE) programme.
- Big Ideas Wales, which includes a national enterprise challenge in primary schools and at least 1,000 entrepreneur role model workshops in secondary schools per annum. The activity is led by a diverse network of over 400 entrepreneurs, known as Role Models, to share business experiences and personal journey of entrepreneurship and bring areas of the curriculum to life. The network includes disabled entrepreneurs such as [Mark Williams](#) of Limb Art in North Wales to inspire learners and share their lived experiences.
- The Alumni project.

In October 2024, Careers Wales launched Bluestone on their CareersCraft resource. Learners can now explore the wide range of careers in tourism and hospitality. From lifeguards to chefs, spa assistants and photographers, learners can now explore the roles and consider the skills needed for them and consider how these skills may be transferable to, or from, other careers.

Careers Wales also support employers to engage with schools. This includes:

- Bespoke advice and guidance on working in education and how to design their input, with access to training if required.
- A dedicated section on our website packed full of information for employers.
- Annual Valued Partner awards to recognise and promote employer contributions.

Data

All available published data has been provided in our response. To summarise this component, in providing support to schools, Careers Wales have delivered over 1,500 group sessions to over 26,000 learners and over 1,100 employer events. In addition, Big Ideas Wales includes a national enterprise challenge in primary schools and at least 1,000 entrepreneur role model workshops in secondary schools each year.

Further Education (FE)

Embedded within the Employment & Enterprise Bureaus in each college across Wales, an Enterprise Champion has been funded in all FE colleges to raise awareness of entrepreneurship as a career option, provide opportunities to learn and practice entrepreneurship skills and explore self-employment as a career option and supporting those students who want to become self-employment or starting a business to do so. Responsibility for the Bureaus has been transferred to Medr as of August 2024. The Enterprise Champions work across the student cohort ensuring that disabled students can access support and guidance by targeting courses where there is a higher number of disabled students, responding to where a tutor has requested specific support for a/group of students as well as promoting achievements of disabled students.

Employment and enterprise bureaus

The key objectives of the bureaus are to offer a recruitment service to local employers and increase the employment opportunities available to learners within colleges.

The [funding](#) supports the costs of an entrepreneurship champion who:

- works with learners (and leavers) from the institution to champion entrepreneurship and support staff to embed entrepreneurship in the curriculum, and
- provides bespoke support to learners and leavers to develop their entrepreneurship ideas and business knowledge, and improve pathways and support them into self-employment and business start-up.
- Employment and Enterprise Bureaus help employers to connect with students and develop their future workforce.
- The Employment and Enterprise Bureaus provide a package of opportunities for students, full and part-time, to build essential employability and enterprise skills. The Bureaus are part of the Welsh Government's Young Person's Guarantee – a commitment to provide everyone under the age of 25 and living in Wales with support to gain a place in education or training and help to get into work or become self-employed.
- The Bureaus, operating in Further Education College in Wales, are inviting employers to engage with them to meet students and discuss employment opportunities they may have within their organisations.
- Each Bureau offers tailored support to students within their college but is open to nurturing ongoing opportunities with employers in their region.

Higher Education (HE)

Universities continue to provide targeted employability support to students from under-represented groups, which includes disabled students. As set out in the circular '[Targeted Employability Support for Students: Delivery Plans and Allocations](#)', £2m was made available for academic year 2023/24. This builds on the activity delivered in academic year 2022/23 against Circular W22/21HE.

Whilst universities have flexibility to build their provision and offer to best meet the needs of their students, it is expected that support includes:

- Mentoring,
- blended delivery of a range of employability activities, including entrepreneurship support,
- signposting / supported access to each university's core employability,
- careers guidance, enterprise and well-being provision,
- provision of funding for costs associated with development of employability and / or work experience to ensure finances are not a barrier to benefiting from the support,
- work experience, of varying lengths and formats.

The Welsh Government provides additional grant funding to support all HE institutions in Wales to promote entrepreneurship, connect with entrepreneurs, and provide support for student and graduate entrepreneurship. They support graduate transition into entrepreneurship and business startup, each publishing their impact report annually.

5. How is the Welsh Government ensuring that disabled learners have the flexibility and support they need to access further education? What your expectations are of how FE, HE and their careers departments support disabled learners onwards into internships and apprenticeships? And how are you engaging with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning in this regard.

All colleges and universities have equalities plans in place and work collaboratively to achieve commitments including promoting equity of access and equality of opportunity. Medr reviews their Strategic Equality Plans, which set out how they will meet duties under the Equality Act, including the protected characteristic of disability.

Colleges are working collaboratively across Wales to meet their equality commitments. They attend ColegauCymru's FE Equality and Diversity Strategic Group. This network considers matters of equality, diversity and inclusion, and reports to the Principals' Forum on actions to make progress.

Universities work collaboratively to achieve equality commitments, including widening participation, and identifying equality gaps in attainment. They have supporting networks and Equalities Leads in place to support and monitor progress.

Further Education

In August 2024, Additional Support Guidance was issued to further education providers to assist with working flexibly and securing support to make provision accessible to learners. It also assists with the costs of making reasonable adjustments, for learners with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

College activity is delivered in line with the Social Model of Disability, which includes:

- Bespoke Careers Fairs and events for students with additional learning needs or quiet hours for those attending main events.
- Offering intensive coaching to students with disabilities.
- Tailored resources and sessions as appropriate, and information sessions on disability rights and adjustments in the workplace.
- Employers who advertise through colleges are committed to adhering to the Fair Working Policy in Wales.

- Working with employers to support and facilitate inclusive recruitment.
- Working specifically with Disabled Confident Employers to create placements for students with disabilities ensuring reasonable adjustments are taken into account.

Specific examples of activity include:

- Grŵp Llandrillo Menai supported 31 individuals with a disability into apprenticeships with a disability uplift intended to support employers to remove barriers for learners in line with the social model of disability.
- Coleg y Cymoedd invited Disability Confident organisations to exhibit and offer specialised information and advice at their annual careers fair, including organisations such as Drive, Maximus and PHS 'Project Search' which is a tailored supported internship for 18-24 year olds with ALN and/or Autism.
- The College Merthyr Tydfil supports an Internship Programme with Independent Living Skills (ILS) learners, where they have the opportunity to undertake internships with Prince Charles Hospital.
- The College Merthyr Tydfil is also working closely with Maximus to support progression into employment for learners with an ALN. Maximus supports learners by attending Careers and ALN events where they offer tailored assistance and resources to help find work.

Higher Education

Universities are focused on embedding employability into the curriculum so that it is accessible to all. Careers departments work with disabled students so that they have appropriate information and advice to build successful outcomes in line with their career plans when they graduate, including employment, internships, self-employment and/or further study.

Universities also work with employers and other stakeholders to deliver targeted interventions to their disabled students to meet their career and employability needs.

The [Targeted Employability Support for Students](#) funding from Medr enables universities to provide tailored support, for those from under-represented groups, including disabled students, to enhance their employability and help them to obtain and sustain graduate level activity when they leave higher education. This includes the [Employability e-Hub](#) - a resource for students who wish to work in Wales. It is committed to helping students along their individual path to success, and provides valuable opportunities including:

- work experience,
- career coaching,
- skills development,
- direct engagement with employers.

The [Reaching Wider](#) Programme is a collaboration of FE, HE and other educational partners delivering widening access activity to encourage school and college learners to consider the futures and their education aspirations as well as academic skills building and mentoring.

It is funded by [Medr](#) and includes all FE and HE institutions in Wales. They also work with local authorities, employers, schools and third sector organisations to improve the education outcomes of learners. It is a regionally focused and long-term programme to widen access to HE and higher-level skills. It aims to increase HE participation from under-represented groups, including disabled students, by raising educational aspirations and skills and creating innovative study opportunities and learning pathways to higher education.

Medr

Medr's [Strategic Equality Plan](#) and equality objectives take account of the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). It contributes to meeting the Welsh Government's ambitions for an integrated and equitable tertiary education, tackling inequalities and promoting equality of opportunity.

Their [Strategic Plan](#) is intended to be set direction and give a sense of priority - it will be supported by an Operational Plan, developed by Medr, which will provide more detail to monitor progress and ensure delivery of individual work streams.

Apprenticeships

Since September 2024 Careers Wales has offered a career's guidance interview to all key stage 4 young people before they leave statutory education. This ensures young people are provided with impartial information and are made aware of all their future pathway options, including, FE, apprenticeships and Jobs Growth Wales+ to make an informed decision regarding their next steps. For those in special schools and resource bases Careers Wales will negotiate the best time to start working with a young person. For some this will be year 9 as they may need a lot of time working with an adviser whilst for others it may be later in their education.

Careers advice and support is tailored to an individual's need but could include:

- Support to develop their career management skills such as decision making and planning,
- Guidance to help a young person identify what type of work they would like to do and how they could get there,
- Practical support to ensure that they have a good transition from school,
- Signposting/referring to other agencies that provide additional support services,
- Advocating on behalf of an individual,
- Negotiating with providers on behalf of an individual,
- Outlining options for parents.

For all Key Stage 4 young people who have identified that they plan on leaving school and are looking to enter the labour market, Careers Wales offers ongoing follow up support which may include support with interview skills/applications.

From April to November 2024 Careers Wales provided 41,000 guidance interviews to over 30,000 learners, including 34,460 guidance interviews to 25,244 Key Stage 4 learners, 52% of year 11 learners, and 2,621 interviews to 1,945 ALN learners.

We are working to increase diversity in apprenticeships and promote social mobility as an investment in economic success and lasting growth. For example, the Inclusive Apprenticeships Disability Action Plan has supported the growth of disabled apprenticeship. In 2022/23, 11.6% of all apprenticeship learning programmes were started by learners who identified as having a disability and/or learning difficulty, compared with 5.8% in the academic year 2016-17.

The Employer Incentive Scheme also encourages employers to recruit disabled people by providing a financial incentive and in-work support for this cohort to enable them to successfully complete their apprenticeship programme.

The Supported Shared Apprenticeships provides additional support to disabled apprentices with intensive and wide-ranging employment and learning needs. Support provided may be through job coaching or other specialist resource.

We have also recently agreed to modify the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW). Part of these modifications include opening up the essential skills entry requirements for levels 2 and 3 for those people with learning difficulties and disabilities. This will provide a more inclusive offer and widen participation by enabling more disabled people to access the apprenticeship programme.

Regarding engagement, Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries are working towards delivery of the Programme for Government commitments and First Minister's priorities that fall across all portfolios. We meet regularly with Ministerial colleagues, to keep them apprised of areas of cross cutting mutual responsibility. The Minister for Further and Higher Education works closely with the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership on areas of mutual interest. There is also a Ministerial expectation that officials, from across Welsh Government, work closely together to identify and address gaps in provision and identify future opportunities.

6. What are the implications, if any, of relatively new Additional Learning Needs legislation and guidance on careers advice and support for disabled young people?

The new Additional Learning Needs legislation and guidance has created one unified system from 0-25 with an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that follows a child and young person through all stages of their education. From September 2025 all disabled young person with ALN will now have an IDP. Careers Wales have reviewed and re-aligned their approach to careers advice and support in light of the new legislation.

Careers Wales have set out and shared with schools and families a clear offer alongside the ALNET Act Implementation. All young people are entitled to access careers information, advice and guidance from Careers Wales, delivered via face to face, telephone, video or digital means. Careers Wales also has a team of ALN advisers who work predominantly in special schools and resource bases. All careers advisers work with young people to help them understand their options, make good decisions about their future and know how to implement their plans. This work may begin earlier than year 11 where appropriate.

For young people identified as having ALN, Careers Wales offer to attend Individual Development Plan (IDP) reviews and have identified those who are leaving to enter the labour market as a priority group. In those reviews Careers Wales may contribute to the transition element of the IDP, advocate on behalf of a young person and make parents aware of opportunities. This year, as young people with IDPs are now in college, Careers Wales have also offered to attend college IDP reviews for young people who are leaving college to enter the labour market.

During the 2023/24 academic year, Careers Wales carried out 1,445 interviews with ALN Learners across all year groups and settings (43 in KS3, 117 in KS4, 249 in post-16, 131 in FE). The move towards the full roll-out of ALNET is increasing the number of interviews undertaken as the emphasis for Career Wales' work changes from Learning and Skills Plans (LSPs) and funding applications, to increased direct work with young people. Careers Wales also attended 218 ALN reviews, as well as undertaking almost 5,000 advocacy and liaison interactions on behalf of young people.

7. *Any other information you want to draw to our attention as to how the Welsh Government is supporting learners in their transition from school-age to the world of work for disabled people?*

Review of Vocational Qualifications

Taking forward the recommendations of both the [Review of Vocational Qualifications](#) and the [Report on Transitions into Employment](#) is a key priority for Welsh Government. Both reports outline where improvements could be made to ensure a smoother transition for all learners from school into employment, including disabled people.

Since the summer 2024, we have established small internal and external working groups (Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and Medr thus far – with a view to expanding the membership as required) to look in depth at the recommendations and consider how best to engage the sector. The working groups will be instrumental in overseeing the delivery of the recommendations outlined in both reports.

It is important to note that there are many co-dependencies associated with delivery of the recommendations. The strategic relationship between Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and Medr is of significant importance in terms of achieving delivery.

The 14-16 Learning Guidance, published in September 2024, sets out our policy for learning and teaching in years 10 and 11, alongside the legal requirements for schools and will form part of the Curriculum for Wales framework guidance. The guidance aims to support schools to design their 14 to 16 curriculum offer, which they will need to have in place by September 2025.

The importance of years 10 and 11 in a learners' education journey is well known, particularly how their choices and achievements can influence their future pathways. The guidance therefore introduces the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement ('the Learner Entitlement'): the learning that all learners in year 10 and 11 will benefit from under the Curriculum for Wales. In addition to a broad offer of qualifications, the entitlement also looks to ensure all learners are supported to understand their strengths and interests, and to plan their next steps once they leave compulsory education at 16, helping them with this significant transition.

Through the guidance we set out our clear national expectations to help provide equity and consistency in the curriculum experienced by learners across Wales, with all schools valuing the same things that contribute to a learner's progression and successful onward transition.

Being part of the Curriculum for Wales framework, the 14-16 guidance places the learner at the centre with a clear focus on all learners being supported to make progress and supported to consider the full range of options available to them post-16.

Disabled People's Employment Champions

One of the strategic objectives of the Disabled People's Employment Champions is to work with policy leads across Welsh Government to contribute lived experience and knowledge to influence the development of wider Welsh Government policy which impacts on disabled people's employment. The champions are delivering this by supporting the work of the Young Person's Guarantee Board and the development of the new Welsh Government Employability Programme. They have also established an effective working relationship with Careers Wales and in 2025 will explore opportunities to work more closely with Medr.

Inspiring Skills Excellence in Wales

Our [Inspiring Skills Excellence in Wales](#) project, funded by the Welsh Government, delivers a programme of activities linked to Skills Competitions that raise awareness of vocational education and training and career pathways.

The project works with partners to promote and facilitate engagement and collaborative approaches between schools, learners and employers to build confidence and knowledge of the world of work, and support learners to make informed choices about their careers and their futures.

In particular, it offers opportunities for learners, apprentices and trainees with disabilities and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) to challenge and benchmark their skills by taking part in Inclusive Skills / Foundation Skills competitions, locally and nationally across a range of sectors.

In Wales, the Skills Competition Wales delivers 9 Inclusive Skills / Foundation Skills competitions, from Catering and Media to Woodwork and Independent Life Skills. In January 2024, over 200 learners participated in these competitions from across Wales.

8. How are you engaging with the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning to ensure that young people have as wide a range as possible of options post-16? For example, we have heard concerns of a “cliff-edge” faced by disabled people in accessing certain age-restricted placements and schemes e.g. Jobs Growth Wales? What consideration has been given to widening access to disabled people of all ages?

As highlighted in response to question 5, the Minister for Further and Higher Education works closely with the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership on areas of mutual interest and there is also a Ministerial expectation that officials, from across Welsh Government, work closely together to identify and address gaps in provision and identify future opportunities. This is hopefully illustrated in the cross-cutting nature of the work being undertaken as detailed in the responses to the specific questions raised.

Jobs Growth Wales+

Jobs Growth Wales+ (JGW+) was originally procured in 2021 with the tender documentation specifying an age range of 16-18. As a result of the impacts of the Pandemic, this age range was extended to allow young people aged 19 to also enter the programme. However, it is not possible to alter the age range any further as this would fundamentally change the offer and could therefore be open to legal challenge from potential suppliers.

Any future programme that is operational from 2027 will consider examples of best practice and will benefit from lessons learnt during the operational delivery of existing employability support, this will include support for specific cohorts such as the required support for disabled people.

As part of the programme we do publish data on the number and composition of participants on JGW+ including those with a disability – this information can be accessed via the following link - [Jobs Growth Wales+ statistics: April 2023 to March 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Vocational Qualifications review

We published our response to the Vocational Qualifications Review (VQR) at the end of April 2024 and are working with colleges to ensure that our approach responds to the needs of learners and our changing economy.

We are progressing discussions about how best to align delivery of these recommendations with related strategic commitments, including our economic mission, related skills development requirements and increasing participation.

Our priority is for all learners to have a positive learning experience, ensuring they can progress confidently to their next steps in education and/or employment.

We will continue to work with Careers Wales to determine how we can best ensure young people, at key transition points, have access to impartial careers information, advice and guidance; ensuring they are aware of all the option routes, including learners with disabilities and learning difficulties.

In addition, Qualifications Wales have been working to pilot the development of route maps for vocational areas. Once the findings of the pilot have been considered, it is hoped that these route maps will be further developed and included on a suitable digital platform so that they are accessible and engaging for learners and stakeholders alike.

Business Wales

Big Ideas Wales has a Participation Fund to support clients that require additional help to access the business support. This has assisted with costs to remove barriers for clients including translation, transportation, carers and practical support to attend and participate in events or 1:1 meetings.

As part of the commitment to the Programme for Government to close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population, Business Wales works closely with the Welsh Government's Disabled People Employment Champions to provide support to ensure that the service develops and considers the needs of those who are disabled. The Business Advisers work closely with the Disabled People's Employment Champions and Disabled People's Employment Advisers within the Business Wales service.

To support disabled entrepreneurs, Business Wales and Disability Wales has produced a good practice guide. The guide provides information and practical advice for business support organisations and advisors on how best to engage with and support disabled people who are starting, sustaining or growing their business in Wales
<https://businesswales.gov.wales/good-practice-guide-supporting-disabled-entrepreneurs-wales>

Business Wales start-up support is available to assist individuals to overcome any barriers to participation in self-employment; and works with businesses to improve employment practices through specialist HR and equalities advice and supports employment opportunities for disabled people.

Specialist support to improve practices is available from Disabled Peoples Employment Advisers who work across Wales and provide tailored support according to client need on a one-to-one basis or at staff meetings. This is part of a wider advisory service for employment, skills and fair work, including stimulating job creation and improving employment policies and practices in inclusive recruitment and retention, encouraging business to review the equalities pledge and wider schemes such as Disability Confident.

We also provide funding to Social Firms Wales to provide bespoke specialist business support to social enterprises. Social Firms Wales supports social enterprises who support and/or employ people with disabilities and have a self-employment and supported self-employment service which includes additional support for people living with neuro-diverse conditions. The support package aligns with the Programme for Government commitment to tackle challenges faced by people across Wales and how to improve their lives.

Business Wales promotes self-employment and employment opportunities for disabled people through events, newsletters and social media channels, as well as Business Wales advisory support.

This includes a range of information and guidance on the Business Wales website on supporting disabled people within the workforce [Disabled People's Employment | Business Wales Skills Gateway \(gov.wales\)](#). [The Disabled People's Employment Champions have recently commenced a project to review and update all web-based content and refreshed content will be published throughout 2025.](#)

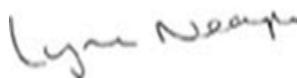
Business Wales has developed an online module developed to help employers increase their knowledge and understanding of the social model of disability [Course: Understanding the Social Model of Disability \(gov.wales\)](#) Work is underway to make this training available to public sector employers

Conclusion

We hope that we have provided a comprehensive response to the queries outlined in your letter and set out the work being undertaken by Welsh Government to support all learners, particularly those with a disability.

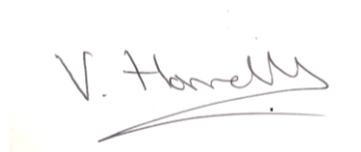
In turn, we are copying this letter to the Chairs of the Children, Young People and Education Committee; and the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely



Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Vikki Howells AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
Minister for Further and Higher Education

Briefing: Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26

January 2025

Introduction

The Wales Women's Budget Group (WWBG) and the Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales have jointly analysed the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26 from a gender equality perspective. This briefing highlights some key points and recommendations. WWBG and WEN have given oral and written evidence to the Finance Committee on the Draft Budget 2025-26. Our full consultation response can be found [here](#) and a recording of the evidence session is available on [Senedd.tv](#).

1. Childcare and early years

- 1.1. The lack of affordable and accessible childcare remains a critical barrier to gender equality in Wales. High childcare costs and significant accessibility issues with government funded provision are compounding the financial pressures faced by families in Wales, leading some parents - particularly mothers - to reduce their working hours or leave the workforce altogether to make up for this shortfall in provision. With over a quarter (25.7%) of women in Wales economically inactive due to caring responsibilities, the lack of adequate childcare provision continues to entrench the unequal economic position of women. These pressures are felt most acutely by low-income families and single mothers, who are being pushed further into debt and poverty in order to care for their children. This has significant implications for tackling children's poverty in Wales, seeing as the root causes and consequences of women's and children's poverty are inextricably linked.¹
- 1.2. Despite significant investment in childcare at a UK level (and corresponding consequential funding being made available to the Welsh Government), funding for the Welsh Government's Childcare Offer was repeatedly cut during the 2023-24 in-year spending changes and the 2024-2025 Budget. These cuts were justified on the basis of lower-than-expected uptake forecasts of the Welsh Childcare Offer. However, it is well-evidenced that the need for affordable and accessible childcare remains critical in Wales. With mothers being pushed into unemployment and their families into poverty, lower-than-expected demand does not stem from a reduction in need. It rather suggests that the design and operation of the childcare offer is not meeting the needs of many families in Wales. .
- 1.3. The 2025-26 Draft Budget includes a £20 million increase in funding for the Childcare Offer, intended to increase the hourly rate paid to providers from £5 to £6. While we welcome this increase to help support the sustainability of the sector and the female-dominated childcare workforce, it amounts to little more than a sticking plaster in the context of previous cuts.. Indeed, the BEL "Support for Children and Play" which covers the Childcare Offer was £101m in 2023-24, £82m in 2024-25 and is £102m in this Draft Budget. There appears to be no budget commitment towards addressing any of the major challenges identified in the Equality and Social Justice Committee's recent inquiry into childcare, including the disjointed nature of the system, the complexity of the application process and the lack of childcare for low-income families. It is also unclear whether the uprating of payments to providers is sufficient to support providers who face closure due to increases in employer NICs.
- 1.4. While the Welsh Government remains committed to rolling out Phase 3 of the Flying Start programme, and has asked local authorities to prepare plans for the final phase, there does

¹ Women's Budget Group (2005), Women's and children's poverty: making the links, <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/112550/women's-children's-poverty-010305-en.pdf;jsessionid=7CF916436D8B79C80A6B8D9D25D182CD?sequence=1>

not appear to be a funding commitment to support this.² Instead, the Children and Communities Grant, which funds Flying Start, received a real terms cut of 2.3% in this year's Draft Budget.

Potential questions

1. The Welsh Government has looked at the reasons for low uptake of its Childcare Offer as part of its evaluation of year 6 and 7 of the Offer. While we understand that this information will not be published until the end of the financial year, how have early findings of this work influenced the budget allocations?
2. What funding has the Welsh Government allocated towards addressing the structural challenges with the Welsh childcare system identified in the ESJ Committee's recent inquiry? How will this budget help pave the way to ensure families in Wales are able to navigate and access this provision?
3. How confident is the Welsh Government that the increase in the rate for the Childcare Offer is enough to avoid further settings closing in light of NIC increases and other pressures? How will this investment help ensure more families can access this essential provision, given that uptake levels are only around 55%?
4. How confident is the Welsh Government that this budget provides enough funding for local authorities to progress at pace the roll-out of Flying Start Phase 3?

2. Cost of living support

- 2.1. Due to persistent gender inequality, women in Wales – particularly single mothers, disabled women, ethnic minority and racialised women – continue to feel the brunt of high costs of living. Support measures, such as the Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF) provides a vital lifeline to those on low incomes. Its increase by over £1 million is therefore welcome.
- 2.2. It is, however, difficult to assess the impact of this allocation on women in Wales, as uptake analysis currently only considers recipients' age. We would therefore welcome a gendered breakdown of the DAF analysis to better understand how many women access this fund.
- 2.3. Regardless of the level of funding, the fact that such payments are made at household level is a concern as it risks undermining women's access to an independent income and increases their vulnerability to financial abuse and financial dependency on an abuser. We would suggest that the Welsh Government could do more to improve the process of these payments as well as ensuring the level of funding is appropriate.
- 2.4. While hardship payments are essential, they are short-term measures that do little to address the underlying causes of the crisis, and help households cope in the longer term. It is important that they go hand in hand with the longer-term work on the structural causes of poverty and inequality.

Potential questions

1. What gender and equalities evidence has the Welsh Government considered in its impact assessment on budget allocations for cost of living support measures such as the DAF?
2. Are there plans to collate and publish data on the number of claimants who are women?
3. What long-term action is the Welsh Government undertaking to tackle gender inequality here in Wales?

² Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council recently published plans according to which Phase 3 will not be completed until 2030.

<https://democracy.npt.gov.uk/documents/s103442/ESW%20Scrutiny%20Report%20-%20Expansion%20of%20Flying%20Start%20Childcare%20Phase%203.pdf>

3. Third sector, VAWDASV and equality and human rights funding

- 3.1. The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence budget has seen an additional £1.3m revenue and £0.9m capital funding in 2025-26. The draft budget allocated an additional £2m revenue and £2.9m capital funding to support the Third Sector. The Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights budget has been increased by £0.7m through the 2025-26 Draft Budget.
- 3.2. While these increases are welcome, pressures on the third sector and the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) specialist support services are at an all-time high and likely to increase with rises to employer national insurance contributions (NICs).
- 3.3. Employer NICs increases represent the third successive hit to charities in Wales, following from the loss of EU funding and the cost of living pressures. These have accelerated a worrying loss of expertise in the Welsh third sector, as exemplified by Chwarae Teg's closure last year.
- 3.4. Women dominate the third sector and specialist workforce and charities often provide public services when provision is cut at local government level. Women also comprise the majority of service users and support receivers, particularly for VAWDASV services.

Potential questions

1. **Is the Welsh Government confident that the funding levels are sufficient to halt the rapid loss of capacity in the Welsh third sector and protect the sustainability of support services?**
2. **How is this budget supporting third sector and VAWDASV organisations to mitigate the impacts of increasing employer NICs?**

4. Gender Budgeting and Strategic Integrated Impact Assessments (SIIAs)

- 4.1. The deprioritisation of equalities issues within the 2024-25 Budget highlighted the urgent need for gender budgeting in Wales. Embedding an intersectional gendered lens in the budget process will ensure that spending decisions are subject to robust equality impact assessment, helping to avoid unequal gendered impacts. As the main source of information on the impact of Welsh Government funding decisions, improving the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessments (SIIA), is key to promoting transparency and accountability in the Welsh budgetary process.
- 4.2. *Gender budgeting*: Some positive steps have been made, including the development of an online gender budgeting resource for government officials and policymakers and the ongoing work to incorporate gender budgeting questions within the Welsh Government's departmental Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment. However, we are still awaiting the publication of the evaluation of the Welsh Government's remaining two gender budgeting pilots – Young Person's Guarantee and E-Move – which were scheduled to end in 2022-23. The learning from these pilots is essential to progress the wider roll-out of gender budgeting within the Welsh Government.
- 4.3. *Strategic Integrated Impact Assessments (SIIAs)*: We welcome the continued work by the Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group (BIIAG) to review the Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIAs). Both WWBG and WEN have been involved in the latest SIIA review and were pleased to see some improvements to this year's SIIA as a result. For example, its format was more coherent, the rationale behind key spending decisions was clearer, there was greater intersectional focus and evidence linked using in-text hyperlinks.

4.4. However, some issues with SIAs remain. There was little to no discussion of any negative impacts of spending decisions or measures to mitigate these. While transparency of decision-making improved, it remains difficult to cross-reference spending decisions with actual budget lines, because the MEG tables do not provide enough detail and BEL headings do not always correspond to the terms used in the budget narrative. This makes it difficult to contextualise spending decisions and understand how spending has developed historically. More detailed information on the impact of specific spending decisions in each MEG is only published as part of the Ministerial evidence to Senedd scrutiny committees. This is generally after the timeframe during which civil society stakeholders can provide evidence to the Finance Committee.

Potential questions

1. What work is the Welsh Government undertaking to progress the roll-out of gender budgeting and when can we expect the evaluation of the pilots to be published?
2. How does the Welsh Government plan to use the findings of these pilots to inform the wider roll out of gender budgeting?
3. What work is the Welsh Government undertaking to improve the transparency of budgetary decisions and their equalities impact, and to ensure civil society stakeholders can fully scrutinise these?

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Agenda Item 7

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

Document is Restricted