

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:

Hybrid – Committee room 2 Senedd
and video conference via Zoom

Meeting date: 21 May 2025

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Naomi Stocks

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Hybrid

Private pre-meeting

09.15– 09.30

Public meeting

09.30 – 10.30

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.30

2 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector – briefing session

09.30 – 10.30

(Pages 1 – 11)

Simon Pirotte, Chief Executive Officer, Medr

James Owen, Chief Operating Officer, Medr

Attached Documents:

Medr briefing

3 Papers to note

10.30

3.1 Children on the margins

(Pages 12 – 13)



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Minister for Children and Social Care from Jane Dodd MS

3.2 Legislative Consent: Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

(Pages 14 – 15)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Llywdd and Chair of Business Committee from the Chair of the Local Government and Housing Committee

3.3 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 16 – 18)

Attached Documents:

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

3.4 Estyn Annual Report

(Pages 19 – 21)

Attached Documents:

Letter to HM Chief Inspector of Estyn from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

3.5 Estyn Annual Report

(Pages 22 – 28)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from HM Chief Inspector of Estyn

3.6 Implementation of education reforms

(Pages 29 – 33)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the WJEC from the National Education Union (NEU)

3.7 Children on the margins

(Pages 34 – 35)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Minister for Children and Social Care from Jane Dodds MS

3.8 Legislative Consent: Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

(Page 36)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

3.9 Intergovernmental relations and workings

(Pages 37 – 38)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

3.10 P-06-1494 Welsh Government to protect funding in education from WG and Local Authority cuts

(Pages 39 – 42)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Petitions Committee from the Cabinet Secretary for
Education

3.11 P-06-1488 Establish a ‘Care Society’ to Tackle the Long COVID Crisis in Wales

(Pages 43 – 44)

Attached Documents:

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

3.12 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 45 – 46)

Attached Documents:

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

3.13 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 47 – 49)

Attached Documents:

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

3.14 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 50 – 51)

Attached Documents:

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

3.15 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 52 – 63)

Attached Documents:

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

3.16 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 64 – 65)

Attached Documents:

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

3.17 Information from Stakeholders

(Page 66)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Karin Philips, Youth Justice Board Member for Wales

3.18 General scrutiny of Ministers with responsibility for health and social care

(Pages 67 – 68)

Attached Documents:

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

3.19 Legislative Consent: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

(Pages 69 – 70)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Children's Commissioner for Wales

3.20 Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill

(Pages 71 – 72)

Attached Documents:

Letter to Qualifications Wales from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and
Welsh Language

3.21 Legislative Consent: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

(Pages 73 – 74)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Children's Commissioner for Wales from the Chair of the
Children, Young People and Education Committee

3.22 Legislative Consent: Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill

(Pages 75 – 76)

Attached Documents:

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

3.23 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025–26

(Pages 77 – 78)

Attached Documents:

Letter to all Committee Chair's from the Chair of the Finance Committee

3.24 Social Cohesion

(Pages 79 – 80)

Attached Documents:

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

3.25 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026–27

(Pages 81 – 83)

Attached Documents:

Letter to all Committee Chairs from the Chair of the Finance Committee

3.26 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 84 – 85)

Attached Documents:

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

3.27 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 86 – 92)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Open University in Wales

3.28 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 93 – 103)

Attached Documents:

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

3.29 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 104 – 106)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

3.30 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 107 – 116)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the University of South Wales

3.31 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 117 – 121)

Attached Documents:

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

3.32 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 122 – 128)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from Cardiff Metropolitan University

3.33 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 129 – 131)

Attached Documents:

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

3.34 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 132 – 142)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
from the Royal College of Nursing

3.35 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 143 – 144)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages from the
Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

3.36 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 145 – 146)

Attached Documents:

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

3.37 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 147 – 148)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

3.38 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 149 – 155)

Attached Documents:

Evidence from the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

3.39 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

(Pages 156 – 158)

Attached Documents:

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

3.40 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 159 – 166)

Attached Documents:

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

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

10.30

Break

10.30 – 10.45

5 Issues facing the Higher Education Sector – discussion on the briefing session

10.45 – 11.00

6 Routes into post-16 education and training – consideration of the key issues

11.00 – 12.30

(Pages 167 – 250)

Attached Documents:

Key issues discussion paper

Findings of stakeholder event & engagement visits

Research brief – Numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Research brief – Regional Skills Partnerships (RSPs)

Research brief – 14 to 16 learner entitlement

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Written submission on the financial
position of the Higher Education sector
in Wales

May 2025

Introduction

This document provides an update on the financial position of the higher education sector in Wales to inform members ahead of our briefing session at the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 21 May 2025.

This briefing sets out:

- our assessment of the financial position of the higher education sector in Wales
- our role as a regulator for the higher education sector in Wales

About Us

Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research) is an arm's-length body of the Welsh Government, established by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 to fund and regulate the tertiary education and research sector in Wales.

This includes:

- further education
- higher education including research and innovation
- adult community learning and work-based education
- apprenticeships
- local authority maintained school sixth-forms

On 12 March 2025, we published our [Strategic Plan for 2025-2030](#) which outlines our vision for the tertiary education and research sector in Wales, including how we intend to operate as a proportionate, risk-based regulator.

Our assessment of the financial position of the higher education sector in Wales

Overview

1. The higher education sector in Wales, in common with the rest of the UK, is currently operating in an exceedingly challenging financial environment.
2. Recent well-publicised downturns in international recruitment, compounded by the impact of high inflation, have led providers to undertake detailed reviews of their operating models and core strategic priorities. A significant number of UK institutions¹ have announced cost-cutting measures including voluntary severance schemes (VSS), course closures and other restructuring activities.
3. Proposals for restructuring, including university-wide VSS have been announced by Aberystwyth, Bangor, Cardiff, Cardiff Metropolitan, Swansea, and the University of South Wales (USW). A limited scheme has also been announced by University of Wales: Trinity Saint David. All institutions report that they are engaging regularly with their trade unions to ensure that the rationale for the difficult decisions required is openly shared and as well understood as possible. Medr is also meeting regularly with national trade union representatives. They report that whilst there is constructive dialogue, based on the principles of social partnership, in many institutions, this is not a universal position. They report that individual branches could be in dispute and ballot members on potential industrial action should institutions plan to make compulsory redundancies in response to the financial challenges they face.
4. We do not believe that any institution is at imminent risk of failure in the short term (i.e. in the next twelve months) providing forecast efficiencies are successfully implemented. However, a number of institutions have significant transformation activities to implement in order to secure their longer-term financial sustainability. We regularly engage with all institutions to understand their financial forecasts; transformation plans; and progress on delivering them.
5. The sections below summarise the factors affecting the financial position of the sector. We will publish our first report on this later in 2025.

¹ [UCU University Restructuring Tracker](#)

Income and Expenditure

6. On 13 May, we published a [statistical release on the finances of higher education institutions, September 2023 to August 2024](#) which provided an overview of the income and expenditure of the sector.

Income

The total income of Welsh higher education institutions was £1.98bn in 2023/24, the same as the previous year.

Income generated through tuition fees and education contracts was £1.11bn, accounting for 56% of income. This is an increase of 5% compared to 2022/23.

Income from funding body grants was £276m, accounting for 14% of income. This is a decrease of 15% compared to 2022/23.

Income from research grants and contracts was £239m, accounting for 12% of income. This is a decrease of 12% compared to 2022/23.

Expenditure

The total underlying expenditure of Welsh higher education institutions in 2023/24 was £2.04bn, 4% higher than in 2022/23 (£1.96bn).

Staff costs were £1.11bn, a 6% increase compared to 2022/23 (£1.05bn).

7. While the financial performance of individual institutions is mixed, the underlying operating position of Welsh higher education institutions in 2023/24 was a deficit of £61m. This is in comparison to a £21m surplus in 2022/23. The underlying position including restructuring costs would have been a deficit of £77m for 2023/24 (2022/23 - £22m surplus). The overall decline is mainly attributable to student recruitment shortfalls and inflationary pressures outstripping income growth.
8. As outlined in the statistical release, universities generate most of their income from tuition fees and education contracts, funding body grants and research grants and contracts. They also receive income from other sources such as facilities and accommodation.

Financial Pressures

9. There are ongoing inflationary pressures on all pay and non-pay costs. Pay costs represent more than 50% of sector expenditure, so managing pay and associated pension inflation is key.
10. The cost of the recent 2.5% annual pay settlement for higher education (agreed on a UK-wide basis) is broadly estimated at a headline £22m, although the actual settlement is more nuanced over the pay spine. Around half of institutions in Wales have indicated that they are taking the step of deferring the settlement on the basis that this may reduce cost savings required.
11. Employers National Insurance increases are estimated to cost the sector £20m per annum. Providers that are Higher Education Corporations are also required to maintain membership of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS). Employer contribution rises from this scheme in 2024 are estimated to cost the sector £6m per annum.
12. The largest non-pay cost for the sector is its estate, which is currently under pressure in a number of ways:
 - providers are heavily exposed to the current high energy costs.
 - cash conservation policies, broadly in place since the pandemic, have meant that internally funded capital projects have largely been on hold. This increases unplanned maintenance costs, backlog maintenance commitments, and over time reduces the attractiveness of the estate to potential students.
 - providers have published net zero plans in line with Welsh Government priorities. These are only being funded where external funds are available, and targets are therefore at risk. Not all providers are able to access funding in the form of long-term loans due to their current borrowing levels and attached covenants which may restrict additional borrowing.
 - large externally funded projects are subject to inflationary funding gaps which need to be addressed by either scaling down the project or sourcing additional funding.
 - increasing cyber security risks and the need to introduce ongoing efficiencies are highlighting a pressing need for significant digital transformation investment.
13. Both staff and infrastructure are important for the quality of the student experience. However, neither can be reduced quickly without planning and consultation with staff and stakeholders, adding to the challenge of forecasting and making the sector vulnerable to short-term deficits following income shortfalls.

14. Transformation requires significant investment, for example to fund severance costs and to improve digital infrastructure to drive efficiencies. This puts pressure on cash in the short term and institutions are therefore forecasting reductions in cash balances to support the planned managed deficits. This has led to further pressure on bank covenant compliance for providers who have borrowings with covenants attached. Erosion of cash balances also reduces the headroom available to institutions to strategically respond to future unplanned adverse events and to take advantage of investment opportunities.
15. Banks and lenders are still generally supportive though the cost of borrowing increases with heightened risk. Any financial shocks or unexpected issues at a UK provider could change bank attitudes about the borrowing risks. Medr's regulatory role and financial monitoring engagement aims to increase lenders' confidence in Welsh providers' financial risk management.

Tuition fees

16. From 2012 until 2024, the maximum tuition fee level for full-time home (UK-domiciled) undergraduate students in Wales was £9,000. In 2024, this increased to £9,250 and to £9,535 for courses beginning on or after 1 August 2025. Once fully implemented, this will generate an estimated £36m additional income per annum compared to pre-2024 levels.
17. Part-time undergraduate fees are not regulated. Welsh-domiciled students studying in Wales can borrow up to £2,625 to pay their tuition fees compared to up to £7,145 for home students studying in England. Consequently, fees charged at Welsh providers for part-time undergraduates tend to be lower than those charged in England, though there is no evidence to suggest that the cost of provision is different. Medr provides funding for part-time undergraduate study intended to contribute to the part-time funding gap.

International students

18. As inflation has eroded the value of tuition fees and teaching costs have come under pressure, more institutions have looked to diversify income into new, international markets.
19. International student tuition fees are uncapped. These have traditionally 'cross-subsidised' other institutional priorities, such as the full costs of research, which are

not met by public grants, and contributed to other costs incurred beyond income from public funding. In recent years, institutions have entered new international markets to diversify their student recruitment and enable them to meet rising inflationary costs. More recently, income generated from international student fees has been used to subsidise teaching costs for UK-domiciled students where costs are increasing above the tuition fee.

20. Growth in international tuition fee income was positive for the short-term financial stability of the sector, however it is a more unpredictable source of income and therefore represents an increase in risk for institutions. The main financial risks are:
 - The majority of international students in the UK are postgraduates (mainly studying and paying fees for one year). This continues a trend away from the more stable three-year income for undergraduate studies, making forecasting less predictable and increasing the challenge for strategic planning.
 - International income is more vulnerable to political changes, both in the UK and in the domiciled countries of the students, as evidenced recently by the recruitment impact of the economic situation in Nigeria and dependants visa changes in the UK.
 - The international market is increasingly competitive which risks driving down fees.
 - The international market has direct and indirect costs such as agent fees and student support which erode the contribution of this income stream.
21. Six institutions in Wales have a high exposure to any issues with international recruitment, with the highest representing 44% of total tuition fee income in 2023/24. For context, HESA data² for 2023/24 indicates that 67 providers in the UK had a higher exposure, with 54 institutions exceeding 50% and the highest at 96%.
22. In line with the wider UK sector, the international post-graduate autumn 2024 intake was below 2023 levels. The spring intake gives no indication or expectation of significant upturn in international recruitment in the short to medium term, with possibility of further downturn.
23. The UK Government White Paper on immigration published earlier this month is leading to significant concern in the sector, with any further disruption to this income stream expected to lead to further requirements for cost saving.³ Institutions are highlighting that further restrictions would likely start to impact core

² [HE Finance Data | HESA](#) – 18 providers not yet included.

³ [Universities UK responds to Immigration White Paper](#)

deliverables.

24. The international recruitment downturn has also affected home student recruitment. There is evidence that higher-tariff competitor institutions across the UK have increased their admissions of home students to mitigate the international recruitment decline, creating more uncertainty for lower-tariff institutions.⁴

Research funding

25. Public funding to UK universities for research and innovation comes through the [dual support system](#), which is made up of a combination of strategic institutional funding and project-specific competitive grants. Project-specific grants do not cover the full costs of the research activity. Typically, funding is at 80% of Full Economic Costs based on the bid submitted, though the level is lower for grants from charities, and grants do not allow for inflationary increases, so in practice universities typically only recover 69% of the costs leading to a UK-wide sustainability gap of over £3bn for AY22/23.⁵ Universities may use some strategic institutional funding to meet the remaining costs, but the main source is income generated from international student fees.
26. UK association to the Horizon Europe research and innovation funding programme has been confirmed. This does not address the funding gaps created by the loss of EU structural funds (ESF), which was the source of around £370m investment into research and innovation since 2014. [Universities Wales](#) estimated that the loss of access to ESF directly impacted 60 projects and placed 1,000 jobs at risk. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has been at a lower level and has not offered the same opportunities for long term investment. The landscape of place-based funding has become more fragmented, requiring universities to be more agile to successfully access these funds and making it difficult to sustain a long-term strategic approach.

Our Role as a Regulator for the Higher Education sector in Wales

27. We inherited regulatory duties from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) on 1 August 2024. These relate to:

⁴ [UCAS End of Cycle provider data, 2024 | Wonkhe](#) | [Higher-tariff universities admit 13% more UK school-leavers than 2023, figures show | Universities | The Guardian](#)

⁵ [Research financial sustainability: issues paper – UKRI](#)

- monitoring regulated institutions' compliance with fee and access plans. These plans outline how they intend to widen access to higher education, increase participation, improve retention and reduce attainment gaps for students from under-represented groups.
 - assessing the quality of education.
 - monitoring institutions' compliance with the Financial Management Code.
 - providing information and advice to Welsh Ministers.
28. With regulatory oversight of eight higher education institutions⁶, we work closely with each institution to develop an understanding of their individual circumstances, challenges and strategies, fostering open, transparent dialogue and operating on a “no surprises” basis. We undertake extensive and regular engagement with key members of their senior leadership teams and, where appropriate, their governing bodies. This includes both collective and individual meetings, regular and ad hoc, in line with our risk-based approach. We also work closely with Universities Wales, the higher education sector representative body.
29. Each institution provides us with data and information that is commercially sensitive and confidential. This is key to informing our understanding and greatly enhances the rigour and timeliness of our assurance processes. Maintaining this confidentiality is essential to ensuring ongoing open communication between the sector and us as the regulator.
30. We assess the performance of each institution across several areas:
- strategic direction – we engage with each institution's senior leadership team to improve our understanding of their strategies and future plans.
 - financial health – we engage regularly with finance directors to enhance the understanding gained from data returns such as audited financial statements, financial forecasts, student recruitment updates and TRAC (Transparent Approach to Costing) returns. We issue and monitor borrowing thresholds for each institution.
 - governance and management – working with the clerks and secretaries to institutions' governing bodies, internal auditors and senior leadership, we improve our understanding of how well their governance and leadership structures operate.

⁶ The Open University is a UK wide institution regulated by the Office for Students. Medr works closely with the Open University in Wales to maintain oversight without unnecessary duplication of regulatory burden.

- students and quality – we improve our understanding about the quality of provision, the learner voice and student satisfaction through in-depth conversations with institutions’ leaders and the student body about the outcomes of quality reviews, National Student Survey results and data returns.
- research and knowledge transfer – we engage with each institutions’ leadership and with key academic and professional services staff to enhance the understanding gained from the Research Excellence Framework and data returns.
- estates – we engage with finance and estates directors to enhance the understanding gained from data returns, such as the Estates Management Record and financial forecasts, about capital plans and estates issues.

University Governance

31. All universities in Wales are autonomous charities, registered with the Charity Commission. Charity rules require that university governing bodies, as charity trustees, must make decisions based on what is right for the university’s mission, thinking about the longer-term implications. In the current environment, this means that university governing bodies must weigh any immediate concerns about loss of jobs or areas of academic provision against the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the institution and its overall mission. Consequently, universities may have no choice but to undertake significant cost-reduction, including cuts to staff numbers, if they are to secure their long-term future. While any restructuring may result in the loss of areas of academic provision, this is a matter for each university’s governing body.
32. Medr’s legal powers respect academic freedom and institutional autonomy and do not permit us to interfere with the detailed running of universities, for example, in areas such as staffing or whether areas of provision or course content must, or must not, be delivered. Similarly, Welsh Ministers do not have the power to place terms and conditions on Medr to require us to make such interventions. Our regulatory role in this context is therefore to monitor the financial sustainability of our universities and, where restructuring is taking place, to gain assurance that due process is followed. In doing this, we will assist where we can, using our funding powers, highlighting risks and concerns to Welsh Ministers.

New Regulatory Approach

33. We are developing a new regulatory system, working closely with the tertiary education sector and the Welsh Government. The Tertiary Education and

Research (Wales) Act 2022 provides the legislative framework for this new system.

34. Our first consultation on the new regulatory system opened on 15 May and will close on 18 July. The consultation sets out our proposals for regulating in a way that is transparent, proportionate and risk based. It also seeks views on the regulatory framework – including some conditions of regulation and funding – powers of intervention and the quality framework.
35. The system will be underpinned by a higher education register, which will list all approved tertiary education institutions in Wales that deliver higher education, with associated conditions of registration.
36. These conditions of registration will cover a range of requirements in relation to financial sustainability, governance and management, quality, equality of opportunity, staff and student welfare, the Learner Engagement Code (which is intended to ensure learners' interests are represented) regard to advice and guidance and charitable status, among others. Some of these conditions will also be reflected in equivalent terms and conditions of our funding for other tertiary education and training providers, which are being developed at the same time. The register will be a regulatory “gateway” for the automatic designation of higher education courses for Welsh Government student support (that is, the ability for students to access tuition fee loans and other support funding).
37. We will monitor how registered providers comply with these conditions of registration using a proportionate and risk-based approach. This will minimise the burden on providers. When we identify a breach of compliance, there will be a range of intervention measures which we could use. These will be set out in our Statement of Intervention.
38. Most conditions of registration will apply from the time of an institution's registration, from the start of the 2026/27 academic year, with full implementation of the registration system being in place from 2027/28. The new system will build on the existing close working relationships and mutual trust.

Medr, May 2025

Jane Dodds

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Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

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Dawn Bowden MS

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Dyddiad | Date: 26th March 2025

Pwnc | Subject: Stakeholder Group on Missing Children – Request for Further Information

Annwyl Gweinidog

I am writing to follow up on an important matter raised during the debate on the Children, Young People, and Education (CYPE) Committee report, Children on the Margins. During that debate, you referenced a stakeholder group that has been meeting to discuss issues relating to missing children. This is an area of deep concern for many of us involved in supporting vulnerable children and families.

I understand that this stakeholder group has been meeting since November 2024. In light of the vital role they play in addressing the risks faced by children who go missing, I would be grateful if you could provide some additional details about the group's work and remit. Specifically, it would be helpful to understand the following:

1. How long has the group been meeting, and how frequently?
2. What is the anticipated timeline for the group to deliver any reports, recommendations, or outcomes from their discussions?
3. Who are the members of this stakeholder group, and what range of expertise and perspectives do they bring to the table?



Jane Dodds

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Given the challenges faced by children on the margins and the complex factors that contribute to children going missing, it is encouraging to know that this issue is being examined through a multi-stakeholder approach. I am keen to better understand the group's objectives and how their work might contribute to strengthening safeguarding and support mechanisms for children and young people.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these questions. I look forward to hearing from you and learning more about the important work being undertaken by the group.

Yn gywir,



Chair, Cross Party Group on Children and Families

Jane Dodds MS/AS

Member of the Senedd for Mid and West Wales

Aelod o'r Senedd dros Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

Cc: Buffy Williams, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee



Elin Jones MS

Y Llywydd

Chair, Business Committee

27 March 2025

Annwyl Lywydd,

Legislative Consent Memorandum for the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill

You will be aware that on 18 February, the Business Committee agreed to invite the Local Government and Housing Committee, the Children, Young People and Education Committee, the Equality and Social Justice Committee and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee to consider the Legislative Consent Memorandum on the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill (the "LCM"), with a reporting deadline of 2 May.

We considered the LCM at our meeting on 19 March. The LCM states that clauses 38 and 51 require consent. We noted that clause 51 relates to the validation of fees charged in relation to the recognition of professional qualifications, which is outside our remit.

We noted that in relation to clause 38, the LCM is concerned with the specific repeal of sections 4, 20, 21, 57 and 58 of the Illegal Migration Act 2023. Whilst we note that these sections could have had an impact on local authority functions, we are of the view that it would be unreasonable for us to report on every UK or Senedd Bill that could have an effect on Welsh local authorities' duties and powers.

We also noted that the LCM will be considered by the three other committees to whom it was referred. On that basis, and for the reasons outlined above, we have decided not to report on this LCM. This is in line with our previous approach on the Illegal Migration Bill LCM.

I am copying this letter to the other committees the LCM has been referred to for information.

Yours sincerely



John Griffiths MS

Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People and
Education Committee**

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Dawn Bowden MS

Minister for Children and Social Care
03 April 2025

National Practice Framework & the Family Drug & Alcohol Courts

Dear Dawn,

Thank you for your letter dated 24 January about the National Practice Framework and your statement on 18 March about the transformation of children's social services. As you know, we have taken a strong interest in children's social services and the support offered to care experienced children throughout the Sixth Senedd.

I would like to seek your clarification on two issues raised in your letter and during your oral statement.

1. In your letter, you state that "Our original intention had been to publish the Framework by the end of 2024". However, as annex A to this letter sets out, previous information from the Welsh Government indicates that the original intention was to publish the Framework by late 2023. Please can you clarify the original intended publication date?
2. I note that your statement of 18 March did not reference the Family Drug & Alcohol Court (FDAC). As you will know, the Welsh Government has repeatedly expressed its support for the FDAC. It accepted the Committee's recommendation to roll-out an FDAC model across Wales, subject to a successful evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot. It reiterated that acceptance in a letter to us dated 15 February 2024. The evaluation of the pilot was published in July 2024 (dated March 2024), which demonstrated positive outcomes for families involved in the pilot. Please can you set out:
 - the Welsh Government's response to the evaluation;
 - your assessment of whether the FDAC pilot delivered value for money;
 - your plans in relation to the FDAC pilot for the rest of the Senedd term; and



- if the Welsh Government is no longer minded to roll-out FDAC across Wales, the reasons for this decision.

Your responses to the above questions will inform our ongoing discussions about the Committee's follow-up work in this area. I would therefore be very grateful if you could respond to the questions above no later than Thursday 8 May.

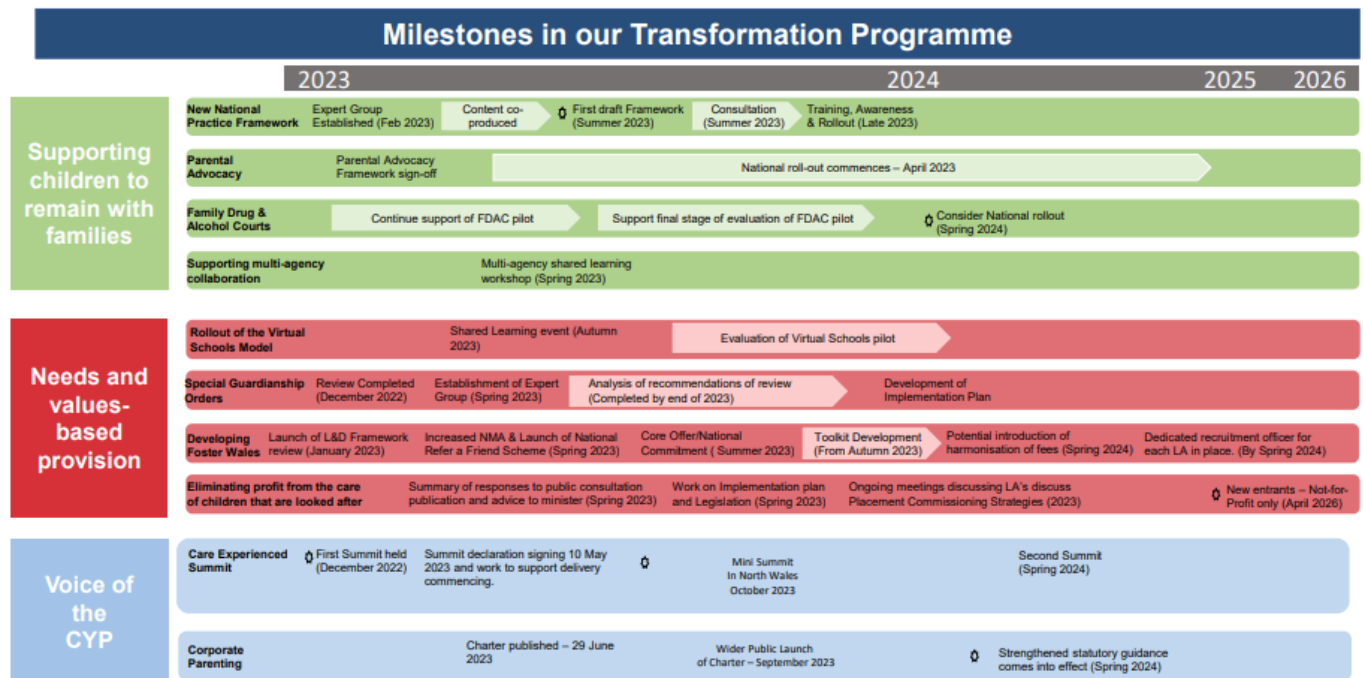
Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Annex A: evidence submitted to the Children, Young People and Education Committee in August 2023

Source: [Letter from the Deputy Minister for Social Services to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee](#), 10 August 2023, page 6



Agenda Item 3.4

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Owen Evans
HM Chief Inspector, Estyn

03 April 2025

Questions following annual scrutiny session

Dear Owen,

Thank you and your colleagues for appearing before Committee on 5 March. We were grateful for your time in relation to both the annual scrutiny session and the evidence gathering session for our 'routes into post-16 education and training' inquiry.

During the annual scrutiny session you agreed to provide a note on the latest numbers of schools in follow-up, the two statutory categories of requiring significant improvement and in special measures, and some characteristics about the schools (including which regions of Wales they are concentrated in, and any relevant pupil demographics).

During the second session your colleagues agreed to provide further information about the support that is provided when compulsory school age ends, including examples of where there are specific problems and examples of what is working well.

We did not have time to ask you all of our planned questions during the annual scrutiny session. We also have some further questions that we would like to ask you as a result of our private discussions. I would therefore be grateful if you could respond to the following in writing.

Curriculum and ALN reforms

1. For a number of years now, developing a shared understanding of progression has been highlighted by Estyn, and acknowledged by the Welsh Government, as an area of difficulty in implementing the new curriculum. Why is this still the case, given the guidance and direction that has been issued by the Welsh Government, and are things going in the right direction or not?

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2. You say in your foreword that schools have made good progress in implementing the new Additional Learning Needs system and complying with the legislation. However, Estyn has also said that implementation is inconsistent and pupils with ALN are not always supported well enough. Can you give us, on balance, a frank assessment of whether the needs of pupils with ALN are being identified and met?

Post-16 education and training

3. Your reports states that the proportion of learners in further education colleges achieving higher grades in both vocational and A-level programmes was too low. Why is this and what needs to be done, and by whom, to address this issue?
4. The issue of completion rates of apprenticeships has come up in this year's report, as it did last year, with concerns about the health and social care sector in particular being raised both years. What, if any, improvements have you seen this year from last year? What factors do you think are causing this issue and who needs to be doing what to address this?
5. Your report notes the challenges apprenticeship providers have faced due to funding cuts and states this has caused a reduction in the number of apprentices. How strongly did this come across during your inspections and what actions are providers having to take to address the reduction in funding?

Other

6. During the evidence session you spoke about what the school system is doing well, and where it needs to improve. On reflection, what do you believe are the three most important priorities for the school system as a whole at this point in time?
7. You told us during the evidence session on 5 March that the Welsh Government has a role in ensuring that school leaders are held to account for how well they share good practice. Do you also believe that local authorities also have a responsibility in this area, and, if so, how can they be held to account for doing so, and by whom?

Thank you again for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff CF99 1SN
Sent by email only

2 May 2025

Dear Buffy

Questions following annual scrutiny session

Thank you for your letter dated 3rd April, please see our response below:

Curriculum and ALN reforms

1. *For a number of years now, developing a shared understanding of progression has been highlighted by Estyn, and acknowledged by the Welsh Government, as an area of difficulty in implementing the new curriculum. Why is this still the case, given the guidance and direction that has been issued by the Welsh Government, and are things going in the right direction or not?*

The Curriculum for Wales gives schools significant autonomy to design their own curricula. In general, school leaders welcome this flexibility, for instance to provide a curriculum that caters to their local context. However, this more open approach has led to difficulties in developing a shared understanding of progression, for several reasons. Whilst they welcome the flexibility many school leaders have indicated that they would welcome more detail around minimum expectations for pupils learning at different points.

The guidance contained within the curriculum's progression steps is intentionally broad. Therefore, interpretations of what progress should look like are not consistent across schools. This can even be the case for schools in the same cluster. Our inspection and thematic work continue to highlight that schools often interpret the guidance contained within the descriptions of learning, differently.

Welsh Government continue to update Curriculum for Wales guidance, but to date it has tended to emphasise principles rather than providing more detail, minimum expectations or exemplification. While this approach encourages innovation, it leaves room for subjective interpretation of the descriptions of learning. Without more specific guidance, schools continue to struggle to align their understanding and expectations of progression, as described within curriculum documentation.

There are differences in the level of detail contained within the different Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE). For example, the guidance for Mathematics and Numeracy generally

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provides more detail (although currently this is not detailed enough) in its progression steps when compared with Expressive Arts or Health and Well-being. This difference creates challenges for schools when trying to interpret the descriptions of learning. The current literacy and numeracy frameworks do not provide sufficient detail to support schools to plan for the progressive development of pupils' skills.

School leaders have noted that it is often difficult to identify updates to curriculum guidance. As the guidance is online, there is no way to see where updates have occurred or amendments have been made, as there is nothing to distinguish what is newer information.

Teachers' and leaders' understanding of effective progression and their ability to interpret and use curriculum guidance is affected by the quality and consistency of the professional learning, the support, and the advice that they receive. Variability in these areas across local authorities and regional consortia has contributed to differing interpretations of curriculum guidance and of progression. Welsh Government initiatives, such as the National Network for Curriculum Implementation aim to address shared challenges and improve collaboration, but to-date have not had a significant impact.

Ensuring effective progression in learning from age 3 to 16 requires close and purposeful collaboration between primary and secondary schools. However, this has proven difficult. Different ways of defining progression in schools, added with the difficulty of coordinating the work of multiple schools, has hampered the development of a better, shared understanding of progression in a majority of clusters. School leaders point to time and resource constraints as hindering their ability to engage well enough in developing a shared understanding of progression. Nevertheless, clusters of schools do not always prioritise or focus on this work well enough.

Welsh Government guidance outlines useful practices aimed at fostering a stronger shared understanding of progression, such as teacher groups from different schools working together to consider and evaluate examples of pupils' work. However, these practices are still not embedded well across all schools. Practitioners would benefit from having more detailed guidance of expectations for pupils' progress and learning.

Curriculum for Wales encourages schools to develop their own assessment arrangements tailored to their curricula and pupils' needs. While this flexibility is empowering, it has led to variability in how well assessment fits with a shared understanding of progression. The Curriculum for Wales emphasises assessment as a tool to support pupil progression rather than merely measuring attainment. This requires schools to focus on identifying where pupils are in their learning journey, determining their next steps, and providing appropriate support or challenges. However, aligning assessment practices with this philosophy requires a change in mindset and for schools to have a clear understanding of progression through their curriculum. The lack of a consistent understanding of progression across schools makes it difficult to ensure consistency and comparability in pupils' progress.

In summary, curriculum guidance, such as that contained within the descriptions of learning, provides a useful foundation for the curriculum. Nevertheless, further help and guidance of minimum expectations would be welcomed to ensure a stronger and more consistent shared understanding of progression across schools.

2. *You say in your foreword that schools have made good progress in implementing the new Additional Learning Needs system and complying with the legislation. However, Estyn has also said that implementation is inconsistent and pupils with ALN are not always supported well enough. Can you give us, on balance, a frank assessment of whether the needs of pupils with ALN are being identified and met?*

These findings are based on our thematic report *'The additional learning needs system: Progress of schools, settings and local authorities in supporting pupils with additional learning needs,'* published in December 2024.

Our report considers how well the funded non-maintained settings, maintained primary, secondary and all-age schools that participated in the review are implementing and embedding aspects of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET) and the accompanying Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Code. It also considers how well local authorities have supported schools.

Overall we found that:

- The requirements of ALNET are encouraging schools, settings, and local authorities to:
 - Increase support for pupils with ALN.
 - Improve understanding of pupils with ALN.
- Successful implementation of ALN reform leads to suitable progress for many pupils.
- Leaders and staff at many schools and settings are developing:
 - Inclusive culture and practice.
 - Focus on learning and well-being of all pupils.

However, the implementation of ALN reform is inconsistent, resulting in:

- Inadequate support for pupils' additional learning needs in a minority of cases, with inclusive vision and purposeful teaching and learning are not effective enough.
- Local authority guidance for improving inclusive teaching and learning is variable across Wales.
- Even in effective cases, schools acknowledge that support and guidance are at an early stage of development.
- Provision to support pupils with ALN in Welsh medium schools remains underdeveloped

Our approach to considering how the needs of children and young people with ALN are being met is contained within each of the three inspection areas of 'What we Inspect'. These areas examine the progress that these pupils are making, teaching approaches including differentiation and reasonable adjustments, the wellbeing of pupils, the arrangements to meet the care, support, and guidance needs of pupils, and the leadership of the school.

More generally, we consider the provision map within the school/provider and the training undertaken by staff. Furthermore, as part of our LGES inspections, we evaluate how well individual local authorities assess, coordinate, and implement the provision for children and young people with ALN where the LA is responsible for securing the ALP as part of an LA IDP.

We welcome the cabinet secretary for education's response in accepting all the recommendations of the most recent thematic on ALNET, including the recommendation that Welsh Government should work with all local authorities to ensure a common and secure understanding of the definition of additional learning provision, and apply it consistently.

While progress has been made in identifying and meeting the needs of pupils with ALN, there is still a significant amount of work required to ensure consistent and effective support across all schools and settings.

Post-16 education and training

3. *Your reports states that the proportion of learners in further education colleges achieving higher grades in both vocational and A-level programmes was too low. Why is this and what needs to be done, and by whom, to address this issue?*

The publication of consistent performance measures for post-16 does not place sufficient focus on the significance of A*-B grades in A levels. This grade range is frequently stipulated by universities when making offers for particularly competitive degree courses. This typically includes Russell Group universities and for courses such as medical science, veterinary medicine and dentistry.

Current consistent measures publications for post-16 in Wales show A*-A then A*-C and A*-E with no clear indicator for A*-B in the graphs. Rectifying this omission by adding A*-B alongside the existing three grade ranges will signal to school sixth forms and colleges the importance of increasing the emphasis on this grade range when setting improvement targets and evaluating their performance.

Current performance measures for post-16 vocational qualifications also do not place sufficient focus on the significance of grade outcomes. There is an over reliance on overall success rates when reporting vocational outcomes, including for level 3 qualifications such as BTEC extended diplomas and their equivalent. This does not provide parity of treatment with A level qualifications and makes it difficult to set meaningful improvement and performance targets and indicators. Action to include grade performance measures on these level 3 qualifications would help remedy this disparity.

[Consistent performance measures for post-16 learning \(achievement\): August 2022 to July 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

Longer term the development of a set of robust value-added indicators for level 3 qualifications including A levels and equivalent vocational qualifications would help transform target setting, performance monitoring and benchmarking in post-16 education. Current approaches such as ALPS and ALIS rely on providers to input entry qualification grades and outcome grades. In order for data to be sufficiently robust and reliable to inform national publication of data there is a need to develop a system that draws existing qualification grades and eventual outcomes directly from official data stored according to unique learner numbers.

4. *The issue of completion rates of apprenticeships has come up in this year's report, as it did last year, with concerns about the health and social care sector in particular being raised both*

years. What, if any, improvements have you seen this year from last year? What factors do you think are causing this issue and who needs to be doing what to address this?

In the best cases training providers are being more robust with the support that employers give their apprentices. They are challenging employers to make sure learners have time away from the workplace to undertake theory work as is the usual practice with other learning areas. They are also challenging employers to make sure that apprentices undertake progress reviews in their employers' premises with suitable time made available. This also includes encouraging employers' managers to attend part of the progress review to contribute regarding the apprentices' progress and discuss and agree how they can give support. Providers are now better equipped to deliver the new qualifications having developed staff expertise and resources. Inspection has identified key areas for improvement in providers.

Issue cause

- Employers are not fully meeting their obligation to support their apprentices. Lack of off-the-job training activities rushed learner progress reviews and lack of manager input into progress reviews. (Providers need to be more robust regarding which employers they work with. Providers need to make employers fully aware of their obligation).
- Apprentices are often experienced in the sector and the apprenticeship is a means of achieving the required qualification. Employers often see apprentices as doing the job as their priority and the apprenticeship something to complete with little support. (as above)
- In a number of cases providers have difficulty accessing employers to undertake learner progress reviews and assessments due to staff absence and workload.

5. *Your report notes the challenges apprenticeship providers have faced due to funding cuts and states this has caused a reduction in the number of apprentices. How strongly did this come across during your inspections and what actions are providers having to take to address the reduction in funding?*

A majority of providers reported that they could not recruit the number of apprentices they had hoped to meet employer demand. This varied across learning areas and geographical regions. Providers have referred learners to other post 16 programmes, which are not always the most appropriate programmes or created waiting lists.

Other

6. *During the evidence session you spoke about what the school system is doing well, and where it needs to improve. On reflection, what do you believe are the three most important priorities for the school system as a whole at this point in time?*

- Improving attendance, in particular of eFSM pupils
- Improving the quality of teaching, particularly literacy and mathematics
- Improving the quality of self-evaluation and securing improvement

7. *You told us during the evidence session on 5 March that the Welsh Government has a role in ensuring that school leaders are held to account for how well they share good practice. Do you*

also believe that local authorities also have a responsibility in this area, and, if so, how can they be held to account for doing so, and by whom?

Local authorities in Wales can be useful in facilitating the sharing of good practice in schools and, importantly, they can be held to account for fulfilling these responsibilities.

Statutory responsibility and strategic leadership

- Local authorities (LAs) in Wales have a legal duty to promote high standards of education in their areas and ensure that schools perform effectively. This duty includes not only providing support services but also creating the right conditions for collaboration between schools, such as sharing effective teaching methods and leadership practices.
- As the tier of government closest to schools, LAs play a coordinating role to ensure that good practice does not remain siloed in individual schools.

Accountability through Estyn's Local Authority Inspections

- Estyn inspects local authority education services on a cyclical basis. During these inspections, Estyn evaluates how effectively the LA is promoting school improvement, which includes how well they encourage and support the sharing of good practice among schools.
- In its inspection reports, Estyn highlight strengths, identify areas for development, and make recommendations. If the LA is found to be underperforming or not fulfilling its statutory duties (including the sharing of good practice), Estyn can place it into a statutory category, triggering follow-up inspections and close monitoring of improvement actions.
- However, in practice, Estyn prefers to promote the sharing of good practice rather than holding providers to 'account' for not doing so. For example, in all our inspection framework where Estyn identifies good practice worth emulating elsewhere, we publish either a spotlight of good practice in our report or request a case study by the provider to place on our website.

Scrutiny by democratically elected members and the Welsh Government

- Each local authority has a cabinet or executive structure, supported by scrutiny committees made up of elected local councillors. These scrutiny committees have the power to call officers and school improvement partners to account on how they are promoting and sharing good practice across schools.
- Where an LA underperforms persistently, the Welsh Government can intervene. Under certain circumstances, Welsh Ministers may direct improvement measures, appoint commissioners, or use other powers to ensure that the authority fulfils its duties. Although these powers are unlikely to be used simply if LAs don't promote the sharing of best practice.

Role of Regional Consortia

- While LAs retain statutory responsibilities, many school improvement functions in Wales were undertaken by four regional consortia working on behalf of multiple local authorities. This partnership arrangement included the intention to spread expertise more widely and encourage

collaborative improvement projects. Any revised school improvement partnership will need to consider how this work continues in the future

- Consortia activities, such as school-to-school support programmes, leadership networks, and professional learning communities, are a key means of sharing good practice. Local authorities are expected to hold their consortia—and vice versa—to account for robustly supporting schools.

Public transparency and stakeholder engagement

- Regular public reporting by both local authorities and regional consortia (through annual reports or performance reports) provides transparency on how well they are helping schools share and implement good practice. Parents, governors, and other community stakeholders can scrutinize this information and raise concerns if they believe good practice is not being disseminated effectively.

In summary: It is important that local authorities know their schools well as they have clear responsibilities for identifying effective practice and ensuring it is shared among the schools in their areas. They are held to account through Estyn's local authority inspections, through scrutiny by elected members and the public, and potentially via Welsh Government intervention if serious concerns arise. Effective collaboration with regional consortia also reinforces this accountability structure.

Yours sincerely



Owen Evans

His Majesty's Chief Inspector
of Education and Training in Wales

Agenda Item 3.6



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Ian Morgan
Chief Executive
WJEC
By email

13th March 2024

Dear Ian,

GCSE reform

Thank you for meeting with us earlier this week to discuss our members' urgent concerns regarding GCSE implementation – especially, but not exclusively, relating to English GCSE. There is a strong demand for **greater consultation** and a **pause** in the implementation of certain aspects of the reforms from our members, particularly where the resources are insufficient, or the guidance is unclear.

National Education Union (NEU) Cymru has been engaged in ongoing discussions regarding GCSE Reform and its implications for teachers and learners in Wales with the WJEC, Qualifications Wales, and the Welsh Government.

The main focus of our interactions with you has been on the **changes in curriculum and assessment**, particularly in light of the challenges around **workload, resources, training, and the pace of implementation**.

However, NEU Cymru's engagement with its members over the past few weeks has revealed a growing sense of frustration and concern regarding the **pace of the GCSE qualification reform** and its implementation in Wales. This includes the **lack of exemplar materials** for new GCSEs, and the **workload impact** of the changes on teachers. They are also concerned about the implications for students, especially those from disadvantage groups, disabled students and those with additional learning needs (ALN).

We have gathered feedback through multiple channels, including emails, internal meetings, and direct interactions with members. As promised, we have attached a detailed outline of their concerns.

Workload, resource availability, and training quality were identified as key issues that must be addressed immediately.

Moving forward, we have assured our members the **NEU Cymru team** will continue to raise these concerns with the relevant authorities, including the **Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales**, and **WJEC**, with a particular focus on **workload** and **resource support** for teachers.

We agree with our members that mitigation of any extra workload is critical, and we ask that English GCSE **implementation be paused**, in order to ensure **teachers have time to prepare for the new course with all the resources they need** to support their students.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Nicola Fitzpatrick

Ysgrifennydd Cymru Dros-dro / Interim Wales Secretary

CC: Lynne Neagle MS, Education Secretary, Welsh Government

Philip Blaker, Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales

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

GCSE Qualification Reform: Key Points and NEU Cymru Members' Concerns

Key Takeaways:

**1. Concerns Over Curriculum Changes:

- Teachers are frustrated with **inadequate resources** and **unclear guidance** regarding the implementation of the new qualifications.
- There is concern over the **increased workload**, particularly with the introduction of mandatory oral assessments and filming of students.
- The **lack of exemplar materials** for the new GCSE qualifications is a critical issue. Teachers are struggling without clear examples of how to implement the new assessment criteria effectively.
- There is a severe shortage of **funding for resources**. For example, changes to the English GCSE will mean schools will have to buy new texts for every student – they do not have the resources to do this.

**2. Feedback from NEU Members:

NEU Cymru members have shared their concerns during **weekly drop-in meetings**, focusing on:

- **Workload and Stress:** There is widespread anxiety about the **mental health** and well-being of staff, with teachers feeling overburdened by the new demands.
- **Inadequate Training and Support:** Members have expressed disappointment with **WJEC training sessions**, citing poorly delivered sessions and lack of answers to pressing questions about the new specifications.
- **Financial Implications:** There are growing concerns over the **financial burden** posed by the changes, particularly regarding the cost of new materials and resources that schools must fund themselves – for example new texts, and photocopying of anthologies.
- **Digital accessibility** – teachers are concerned they are expected to share information on a screen without access to the technology. They also raised concerns about the capacity of the technology schools to capture information, and the **increased workload** in terms of modifying files.

****3. Impact on Students:**

- Teachers raised concerns about the potential disadvantages that **Welsh students** might face in comparison to their counterparts in England, especially given the **lack of resources** and the **pacing of changes** in Wales.
- The move from **three-tier** to **two-tier** qualification systems in certain subjects (e.g., maths) could cause confusion for students and universities, affecting their **university admissions**.
- Teachers raised concerns about pupils not wanting to be filmed, because of the impact on their mental health and wellbeing. The bar appears to have been set very high for students to be exempt.
- Teachers had concerned about safeguarding in terms of filming pupils.
- Teachers are concerned that any reasonable adjustments are being seen as a requirement of the school, not the WJEC. For example, access to large print anthologies for visually impaired pupils.
- Teachers felt that there was an expectation anthologies could be read on a screen – without the understanding that schools and pupils do not have widespread access to devices.
- Teachers felt the level of texts may exclude many pupils, and does not represent the level of literacy in cohort.

****4. Concerns about WJEC:**

- Members criticized **WJEC's response** to concerns, describing them as unhelpful and dismissive.
- **Training provided by WJEC** was seen as unprofessional and insufficient, with **no exemplar materials** and unclear mark schemes being major points of concern.

****5. Key Issues Identified in Meetings:**

Monday, March 3rd, 2025 – GCSE NEU Member Drop-in Meeting

- The group discussed concerns related to the **new qualifications in Wales**, focusing on:
 - **Implementation difficulties**, especially regarding the lack of resources and preparation materials.
 - **Concerns about accessibility** and the **increased workload** for teachers.

- **Financial strain** on schools due to the additional resources and training needed for the new qualifications.
- **Lack of engagement** from WJEC and the **slow rollout** of exemplar materials – teachers commented they have not been told what ‘good’ looks like, and will not know before teaching the course in the autumn.

Tuesday, March 4th, 2025 – GCSE NEU Member Drop-in Meeting

- The group discussed the **implementation of the new curriculum** and voiced concerns over:
 - **Poor quality training** sessions from WJEC and its impact on teachers.
 - **Lack of exemplar materials** and the challenges of **assessing the new curriculum** without proper support.
 - The issue of **AI** in assessments, particularly **AI misuse** and concerns about its policing – they felt that there is a lack of resources or support for assessing the use of AI, and yet that teachers were expected to spot the use of AI.
 - **Concerns over workload** for teachers due to the increased demands of the new specifications and a **lack of preparation** since the reforms started.
 - The **monopoly** held by WJEC in Welsh qualifications, leading to calls for more competition from other exam boards.

Jane Dodds

Aelod o'r Senedd dros
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

Member of the Senedd for
Mid and West Wales

Agenda Item 3.7

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Dawn Bowden MS

Minister for Children and Social Care

Welsh Government

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Dyddiad | Date: 04/04/2025

Pwnc | Subject: Inquiry on Hillside Children's Secure Unit Monitoring and Accessibility

Annwyl Dawn

I'm writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Children and Families and Children in our Care Cross-Party Groups regarding the monitoring of practice at Hillside Children's Secure Unit.

Could you kindly outline the monitoring and inspection framework in place for Hillside? Additionally, is Hillside considered solely a Welsh resource, or does it provide placements for children from other parts of the UK? If the latter, I would appreciate any information on the average number of places taken up by children from Wales versus those from elsewhere.

I have copied in Sioned Williams, who represents the constituency where Hillside is based and plays an active role in both cross-party groups. I would also welcome your thoughts on whether visits from Senedd members would be beneficial and, if so, when you last had the opportunity to visit Hillside, given its high profile.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your response.

Jane Dodds

Aelod o'r Senedd dros
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

Member of the Senedd for
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Yn gywir,



Jane Dodds MS/AS

Member of the Senedd for Mid and West Wales
Aelod o'r Senedd dros Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

CC: Sioned Williams MS - sioned.williams@senedd.cymru

CC: Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee -
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Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA-JH-0452-25 / JH/PO/174/25

Mike Hedges MS
Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee

11 April 2025

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your letter of 20 March, seeking further information about our position in relation to clause 53 of the Border Security, Asylum and Immigration Bill LCM. I have also responded to a separate letter about this LCM from the Chairs of the Equality and Social Justice Committee and the Children, Young People and Education Committee.

Why are you not seeking consent for clause 53 of the Bill? Clause 53 contains a regulation making power for the Secretary of State to make consequential provision. These regulations may amend, repeal or revoke any enactment. Clause 53(3)(c) states that “enactment” includes an enactment contained in, or in an instrument made under, a Measure or Act of Senedd Cymru.

Clause 53 was not included in the LCM as it is a narrow power which is restricted to making required amendments to existing legislation as a direct consequence of the provisions of the Bill coming into force. This power will primarily be used in relation to reserved subject matters, as the majority of the Bill is outside legislative competence.

I hope this response assists the Committee in considering the LCM.

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Agenda Item 3.9

Jane Hutt AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y
Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: JH/PO/178/25

Mike Hedges MS
Chair
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Senedd Cymru

14 April 2025

SeneddLJC@senedd.wales

Dear Chair,

Inter-Institutional Relations Agreement: Forthcoming Intergovernmental Meetings

I am writing in accordance with the Inter-Institutional Relations Agreement to notify you that I attended the third meeting of the Four Nations Group on the UK Government Child Poverty Strategy. As I noted in my letter to you in November the purpose of the group is to embed Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland into the development of a UK-wide strategy on Child Poverty. The group will provide the opportunity for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to inform the development of the UK-wide strategy and ensure the proposed strategy complements existing and developing strategies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The meeting, held on the 19th of March was chaired by Catherine McKinnell MP - Minister for Education. Also in attendance was Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP – Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Scottish Government and Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities

The meeting focused on a number of areas relevant to the UK Government Child Poverty Strategy including Employment, Social Services and Financial Inclusion. During this meeting I highlighted key Welsh Government policies on childcare and transport, fair work, employment and skills, the Welsh Benefits charter and income maximisation. I also took the opportunity to highlight the importance of any welfare reforms considering the benefit cap and two child limit.

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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.

I am copying this letter to Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs; the Children, Young People and Education Committee; and the Equalities and Social Justice Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Hutt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a distinct 'H'.

Jane Hutt AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol, y Trefnydd a'r Prif Chwip
Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip

Agenda Item 3.10

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

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1494
Ein cyf/Our ref LN/00134/25



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair - Petitions committee

Government.Committee.Business@gov.wales

14 April 2025

Dear Carolyn

Thank you for your letter of 3 February regarding Petition P-06-1494 Welsh Government to protect funding in education from WG and Local Authority cuts, following your consideration of the petition on 20 January and further correspondence from the petitioner, Catherine Drews, to the Committee on 13 January.

Regarding ring-fencing of funding to protect education within local authority budgets, decisions on the level of funding available to schools and to other services are made by each authority as part of their overall budget and council tax setting. This is in line with the Welsh Government's policy that local authorities are best placed to judge local needs and circumstances and to fund schools accordingly.

Local authorities and schools are responsible for providing a suitable education for all learners, including those with additional learning needs (ALN). It is for local authorities to determine how to spend the total resources available to them in order to best meet their local needs. Local authorities are however, expected to work with schools to ensure school funding arrangements are effective in supporting and raising the achievement of all learners, regardless of their needs. Schools have the opportunity to influence their local authority's decisions on school budgets by engaging in dialogue with authorities including through their budget forum, which is required in law. Once local authorities set budgets for their schools, management of those budgets is the responsibility of the school's governing body.

In determining the overall levels of funding for local government, Welsh Government took into account the pressures local authorities were reporting in budget discussions. In particular, we were conscious of the powerful points local authority partners and schools have made around pressures in ALN and wider education provision. Local government stressed the pressures on front line services, including demand and inflationary pressures, notably pay, across the breadth of local authority responsibilities.

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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.

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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.

Despite significant budget pressures we have continuously prioritised public services. The 4.5% increase to the Local Government Settlement for 2025-26, builds on previous increases of 9.4% in 2022-23, 7.9% in 2023-24, and 3.3% in 2024-25.

On 7 February I published the [Review of School Funding Formula in Wales](#), which provides a summary of an in-depth analysis of local authority funding formulae across Wales. The aim of this analysis was to understand the complexities and decision-making processes in relation to school funding formulae. The published report includes recommendations that we will take forward to address the findings of the review, this includes a recommendation around ALN funding. This review and its recommendations will enable us to consider how the system can be improved to make a fairer funding system across Wales, to enable more transparent, comparable and consistent funding across Welsh schools.

In addition to the un-hypothecated funding through the local government settlement, hypothecated funding is provided for education through grants. Grant funding is useful in allowing Welsh Government to target specific areas, projects, or initiatives that align with its priorities. Grants often come with specific conditions and reporting requirements, and are a way of providing additional ringfenced support to the education sector.

I have prioritised funding for schools within the Education Budget. On 5 March I [announced](#) a further £20m for schools across Wales. This is in addition to previous announcements which will see funding provided through the Local Authority Education Grant increasing to £435.5m in 2024-25. For 2025-26, over £402m will also be provided through the Local Authority Education Grant. This grant funding does not include the extra money we give to local authorities for our demand-led schemes including UPFSM and School Essentials Grant.

Through additional in-year funding and the 2025-26 Final Budget, the education sector is set to benefit from an additional £262.5m in funding, with schools, colleges and other settings receiving funding to help meet the needs of learners across Wales. The funding will be made up of £151m additional funding for 2024-25 and £111.5m additional funding allocated in the 2025-26 Final Budget.

Additional hypothecated funding has been granted for a number of purposes, to underpin the infrastructure, enable implementation, and increase provision to support ALN learners. This funding is allocated through the Education Reform element of the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG), which supports reforms across schools and settings, supporting four policy areas: Curriculum for Wales, ALN, Professional Learning and Leadership and the Whole School Approach.

As mentioned in my previous letter to the committee, I announced additional in year funding, which included an additional £10m to support local authorities and schools in delivering provision for learners with ALN across Wales, and £5m to be directed to schools to increase the capacity of the Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCo's) and to prepare to move them to the senior management / leadership team. This funding has been allocated through the LAEG, increasing the 2024-25 ALN grant from £22m to £37m.

To continue this investment in ALN reform, the 2025-26 Final Budget maintains the £10m uplift to support local authorities and schools in delivery of provision for learners with ALN, taking the 2025-26 ALN funding, through the LAEG, up to £32m. This funding is allocated to support:

- [Funding for ALN Provision](#) - In response to growing demand and complexity of need, funding is provided to increase additional learning provision for children and young

people to improve planning, appropriate workforce and access to high quality provision for learners with ALN.

- Funding for ALN Quality and Delivery – Local Authorities - To continue funding support costs associated with implementing and embedding the ALN system, maintain ALN processes including quality assurance and Person-Centred Practice (PCP) and support local authorities and schools to deliver their statutory duties under ALNET.
- Funding for ALN Quality and Delivery – Schools - To continue funding support costs associated with implementing and embedding the ALN system, improve the planning and provision to support high quality teaching and learning and support schools to deliver their statutory duties under ALNET.

We understand that having a medical diagnosis for neurodiverse conditions, like autism, can help people of all ages gain a greater understanding of their condition and to help find strategies that work for them. Demand for neurodivergence services has grown significantly in recent years and the Welsh Government is committed to tackling long waiting times for diagnosis. A National Neurodivergence Improvement Programme is in place to transform neurodivergence services and on 3 February 2025 the Mental Health and Wellbeing Minister announced an investment of £13.7m to extend the work of this Programme and to support the [National Neurodivergence Team](#) until March 2027. This funding builds on the £12m invested in the Programme over the past three years and the £3m already announced to reduce the longest waiting times for children's assessments.

Our ALN reforms aim for long-term systemic change so children and young people with ALN receive the support they need. For lots of learners and families this is working well and as evidenced by Estyn in their recent [thematic review](#), the requirements of ALN reform are starting to ensure improvements in provision for pupils with ALN across the country and there is much excellent practice. I remain concerned, however, that it is not working for all learners which is why we are working with key partners on improvements aimed at addressing the challenges that remain.

Regarding attendance, all parents and carers have a legal responsibility to ensure their child regularly attends school. There are often complex and multiple factors lying behind non-attendance. These could include mental health and wellbeing, availability of specific learning support services, and the ever-rising cost of living and attitudes of parents and learners towards school attendance generally.

Fixed penalty notices (FPN) should be used as part of a package of intervention and support strategies to improve attendance. It should also be considered whether a fine will be effective in getting a child back to school.

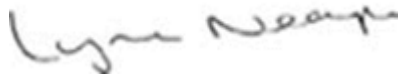
We remain clear that fines are to be used in only the most extreme cases, as part of a range of options and when all efforts to engage with the family have been tried and failed and where it is evident that there are no underlying reasons that are impacting upon attendance at school which could otherwise be addressed through a suitable support plan.

The local authority must have made all reasonable efforts to accommodate and support the family and pupil through engagement with their Education Welfare Officers and via a Family Engagement Officer, to ensure that all other possible measures have been attempted before an FPN is issued as a last resort.

I know that across Wales, leaders, elected members and officers will be striving to find ways to make the best use of their resources. Whilst there is an increased settlement, we

recognise that demand for services, alongside cost pressures mean that local authorities will still need to make difficult decisions on services, efficiencies, and council tax in setting budgets.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Lynne Neagle'.

Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg

Cabinet Secretary for Education

Agenda Item 3.11

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Carolyn Thomas MS

Chair, Petitions Committee

22 April 2025

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Re. Petition P-06-1488 Establish a 'Care Society' to Tackle the Long COVID Crisis in Wales

Dear Carolyn,

Thank you for your letter dated 7th March about our ongoing or planned inquiry work regarding the Welsh Government's strategic approach to Long COVID.

We are not currently undertaking, and do not have any plans to undertake, any work that relates directly to the Welsh Government's strategic approach to Long COVID.

However, COVID and its long-term impacts have been relevant to most of the scrutiny work we have carried out during the Sixth Senedd. Here are some examples of current and completed pieces of work that are particularly relevant to the above petition:

- Pupil absence, which considered absenteeism of pupils as a consequence of COVID, amongst other factors (completed)
- Mental health support in higher education, which considered specifically what the impact of COVID has been on the mental health of university students (completed)
- Services for care experience children: exploring radical reform, which considered the Welsh Government's basic income trial for care leavers (completed)
- Implementation of education reforms, which considers the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, the rollout of which has been significantly affected by COVID (ongoing)
- School improvement and learner attainment, which will consider whether, and to what extent, pupil absence has an impact on educational progress (planned for summer 2025)



**Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament**

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The petitioner will also find reference to COVID throughout our annual scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget, Estyn, Qualifications Wales and the Children's Commissioner for Wales. My clerks would be happy to provide any more information about those areas of work if that would be helpful. Your petitioner can contact them any time by emailing SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales.

I hope this information has been useful.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 3.12



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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

Ein cyf/Our ref: DB/PO/0196/25

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Dear Buffy,

23 April 2025

Thank you for your letter of 3 April seeking clarification on two points from my previous letter and Oral Statement in relation to the National Practice Framework and Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs).

1. Publication date for National Practice Framework:

I can confirm at the time of the Committee's inquiry into the radical reform of children's services, Welsh Government's intention was to publish the Framework by the end of 2023. During 2023, extensive discussion and engagement took place which meant that, whilst not having the final published version, a draft Framework was in place ready to share for further engagement in early 2024. Extensive work and continuing engagement was required during 2024 given the range of issues raised. Further work has been undertaken on the Framework since my last letter in January, and we will be publishing the Framework as planned at the end of April. I will write to you again on its publication. I appreciate this has taken longer than we had hoped but it was important to ensure we have both buy-in and traction with this key work.

2. Family, Drug and Alcohol Courts

The Welsh Government's response to the evaluation

The evaluation of the Welsh pilot in Cardiff and the Vale has been of great interest to Welsh Government, and we are continuing to keep abreast of wider FDAC development across the UK to glean as much learning about the model as possible. We have liaised with LFJB Chairs and Sponsors around the FDAC Evaluation and discussed the findings with the Wales Family Justice Network. A number of positives were identified in the Evaluation and the Working Group has been established to consider how the learning from this can be expanded across Wales; and how FDAC interacts with other existing services in Wales. The Working Group will report back in the Summer.

Assessment of whether the FDAC pilot delivered value for money

The two-year Cardiff and the Vale pilot was funded by Welsh Government to learn lessons that would support potential roll-out of the FDAC model. Learning from the pilot is reported in CASCADE's Evaluation which focussed on the implementation of the Cardiff and Vale

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pilot, how it operated, how it was experienced in this context, any indicative evidence of impact, and how suitable it is for wider roll-out and evaluation. The Evaluation was not an impact evaluation, nor did it include an economic analysis so value for money was not a consideration. However, the [“The Case for Investment” report by the Centre for Justice Innovation](#) is focused on value for money of the FDAC model more generally. The Report demonstrates a break-even point for local authorities in year two of operations, and sets out projected savings of the different options for central government.

Plans in relation to the FDAC pilot for the rest of the Senedd term

The Cardiff and Vale FDAC pilot has ended and there are no plans for it during the rest of the Senedd term. As I previously mentioned a FDAC Working Group is looking at FDACs, but is also considering the model more widely in the Welsh context.

The Working Group is working creatively with other agencies with an interest in this area, including those in other parts of the UK, to explore a move from adversarial Court Proceedings to more trauma-informed work with families.

In addition to the work around supporting parents during Care Proceedings and looking at the FDAC model, Welsh Government is working closely with All Wales Heads of Children’s Services to explore the infrastructure that supports parents during pre-proceedings and children at the edge of care. We are planning a two-part workshop, with local authorities and wider partners, which will consider the good practice already in place and how we ensure there are services and structures to better support children and families so we reduce the numbers of families entering public law court proceedings and fewer children come into the care of the local authority.

By the end of the Senedd term I want to be in a position to have clear recommendations and a pathway for change.

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Bowden AS/MS

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

Agenda Item 3.13

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Lynne Neagle MS

Cabinet Secretary for Education

Vikki Howell MS

Minister for Further and Higher Education

Jack Sargeant MS

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnerships

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22 April 2025

Information following evidence session on April 2

Dear Lynne, Vikki and Jack,

Thank you for appearing before Committee on 2 April and for your written evidence as part of our inquiry 'routes into post-16 education and training'.

During the evidence session you helpfully agreed to provide us with some additional information about the following:

- the education business partnership being run by Careers Wales;
- the work that Careers Wales are doing to deliver work experience opportunities to year 11 pupils (including its current scale, and any changes the Welsh Government wants to see in that area);
- the work currently being undertaken by the Welsh Government and partners regarding the expansion of junior apprenticeships Wales wide, including the work being undertaken by Medr, and timelines for any future expansion of the programme;



- the proportion of Welsh domiciled learners who put a Welsh university as their first choice university, if that data is available (data suggests that students from Wales are more likely to cross borders than students in England and Scotland¹);
- the different scholarships that are available to learners to study through the medium of Welsh; and
- the timeline for developing an integrated, comprehensive strategy for education and vocational training.

You also agreed to ask Medr to consider issuing to us up-to-date data about foundation and higher apprenticeship starts and anticipated future trends in apprenticeship take-up.

We had two additional questions that we did not have time for during the evidence session. We would be grateful for your responses in writing to the following:

- The OECD report you've just published says that, unlike many countries, Wales does not have a measure of completion that sets out the basic competencies that young people are expected to have at the end of formal schooling at 18. It says this means that society focuses on learners achieving three A levels at A*-C rather than a measure that is accessible for all learners. How does the Welsh Government respond to this conclusion? And are you considering acting on it?
- Over and above the creation of Medr, are there any other big structural changes on the table? For example, we've heard arguments from some professionals in favour of a move away from school 6th forms to a full tertiary model post-16.

And finally, after the evidence session we discussed the '14-16 learner entitlement', which you raised in relation to discussions about competitions between post-16 institutions and that impact of that competition on the quality of advice given to learners. Please could you provide us with some information about what that entitlement will look like and the timescales for delivering it, including what you hope it will do to improve the quality of information provided to learners about their post-16 options and how institutions' compliance with that entitlement will be monitored and enforced?

I would be very grateful if you could provide a response by Friday 16 May, so that your views can feed into our key issues discussion, which is currently scheduled for 21 May. If this timetable is problematic for you please don't hesitate to contact our clerks at the earliest opportunity.

¹ HESA, 'Higher Education Student Statistics: UK, 2023/24 - Where students come from and go to study', 20 March 2025

Once again, thank you and your officials for your time attending Committee on 2 April and for your constructive engagement with our inquiry.



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Nikki Lawrence

Chief Executive, Careers Wales

22 April 2025

Chair to Careers Wales - Request for information about careers advice

Dear Nikki,

Thank you for appearing before Committee on 6 February and for your written evidence as part of our inquiry 'routes into post-16 education and training'.

We have now finished gathering oral evidence for our inquiry. However, there are some specific issues that we would like to follow up in more detail to help us come to conclusions and make recommendations in our report.

I would therefore be very grateful if you could reply to the following questions by 16 May 2025.

In relation to your tailored work experience programme on behalf of the Welsh Government:

1. Please could you confirm the eligibility criteria for this tailored work, how learners are put forward and who assesses their eligibility? Could you also provide more information about the numbers and characteristics of learners who have been eligible for that programme by year and what data is collected and published about that? In what areas does the programme operate? What is the cost per pupil of delivering this tailored work?
2. Are there any groups of additional learners who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, who you believe would benefit from the programme, but are not currently eligible for it due to capacity/funding constraints? If so, what would be the approximate cost of scaling up the programme nationwide to those learners?

In relation to work experience more generally:

3. What would be the approximate cost of Careers Wales providing a Wales wide work experience matching and placing service to all year 11 pupils, including the administration of assessing any required DBS, insurance and health and safety measures?

In relation to your careers guidance service for secondary school-age pupils:

4. To what extent do you believe that your standard offer of a careers check and a careers advice interview for every pupil in years 10/11 meets the needs of the majority of pupils across Wales and how do you assess this? What is the mechanism for evaluating the learner's view of your input?
5. Are there any additions to your standard offer that you believe would offer good value for money in terms of supporting learners and their families to understand the options available to them post-16? What would be the approximate cost of providing those additional services?

If you have any questions about the information that the Committee is requesting, or have any concerns about the timetable, please don't hesitate to contact our clerks at any time by emailing SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

In relation to your tailored work experience programme on behalf of the Welsh Government

1. Please could you confirm the eligibility criteria for this tailored work, how learners are put forward and who assesses their eligibility? Could you also provide more information about the numbers and characteristics of learners who have been eligible for that programme by year and what data is collected and published about that? In what areas does the programme operate? What is the cost per pupil of delivering this tailored work?

The eligibility criteria for tailored work experience (TWE) are included in the table below.

Criteria	Description	Yes/No
Attendance	Learner attendance is giving the school a cause for concern (in the term preceding a referral to the project) *	
Behaviour	Learner behaviour is giving the school a cause for concern	
Attainment	Learner is operating below individual targets	
Child looked after		
Entitled to free school meals (FSM)		
Additional learning needs (ALN)		
English as an additional language		

**We are not giving specific % attendance figures for this pilot which allows us to work flexibly to meet the needs of schools and learners.*

The referral criteria were used as part of regional ESF programmes (Cynnydd, TRAC and Inspire2Achieve). Careers Wales was a delivery partner in these programmes and TWE was part of the service offer.

From 2022, TWE was funded by Welsh Government (WG), and we were specifically asked to ensure that there was coverage across Wales i.e. the service was offered to mainstream schools in every local authority (LA). WG provided us with data on school attendance and FSM, and we were asked to 'target' the top two schools in each LA:

- those with the lowest aggregate attendance in KS4



- those with the highest numbers of FSM eligible learners.

To make this approach work, it was not possible to introduce arbitrary figures for referral criteria like attendance because figures vary across LAs.

Using the criteria above, schools identify learners they feel would benefit from a TWE placement and complete a referral form which includes parental consent. Careers Wales Business Engagement Advisers (BEAs) meet the learners referred by the school to establish if they want a placement and if they are ready to commit and engage with a placement.

Regarding the 'numbers and characteristics of learners who have been eligible for the programme' -

The nature of the referral criteria means it is not possible to provide (and therefore publish) this data i.e. it is not possible to provide a total figure for Wales. As noted above, to ensure we made an offer to schools in all LAs, we did not set minimum attendance levels or this would have favoured LAs and schools in certain parts of Wales e.g. South Wales Valleys, North East Wales. Similarly, the criteria relating to behaviour and attainment is used to reflect individual schools rather than a total data set.

Between Sept 2022 and March 2025, 1,537 learners were referred for placement. Of these, 478 were categorised as 'unsuitable' for a placement (the learner did not want a TWE placement, the learner lacked confidence to attend a placement, the learner exhibited behaviour which the BEA assessed as a potential health and safety risk for the learner or others at the workplace).

Between September 2022 and March 2024, the programme operated in two schools in every LA in Wales (the two schools with lowest attendance and highest levels of FSM in each local authority – using data supplied by WG). Due to reduced funding, between April 2024 and March 2025, the programme operated in two schools in 13 LAs – see 'clusters' below. LAs and schools were selected based on WG attendance and FSM data and location of Careers Wales BEAs.

- Swansea & Carmarthenshire
- NPT, RCT & Blaenau Gwent
- Merthyr Tydfil, Torfaen & Powys
- Cardiff & Newport
- Anglesey, Conwy & Gwynedd



Between September 2022 and March 2025, Careers Wales drew down £688,102 (£470,102 in 2022-24, £218,000 in 2024-25) and placed a total of 910 learners which equates to approximately £756 per TWE placement.

2. Are there any groups of additional learners who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, who you believe would benefit from the programme, but are not currently eligible for it due to capacity/funding constraints? If so, what would be the approximate cost of scaling up the programme nationwide to those learners?

We have identified three additional groups of learners who we believe would benefit from the programme:

- 1. Learners categorised as ‘unsuitable’ for placement** – These are learners that schools have referred for TWE but Careers Wales BEAs have established that the learner did not want a TWE placement, the learner lacked confidence to attend a placement or the learner was exhibiting behaviour which the BEA assessed as a potential health and safety risk for the learner or others at the workplace. If these learners were identified early enough and the programme had the capacity to work with learners to prepare and support them to fully engage with a placement, some of this group might be able to participate and experience the benefits of the programme.
- 2. PRU learners** – to date, WG has asked Careers Wales to make the offer of TWE to mainstream schools. However, some learners in PRUs may also benefit from a TWE placement. Typically, learners in PRUs often have more challenging behaviour and might benefit from some preparatory work before Careers Wales begins finding a placement. Behavioural challenges could make it more difficult for BEAs to source a suitable and understanding employer to offer a placement. If a placement is sourced, the learner might need a greater level of support from Careers Wales to sustain the placement.
- 3. Learners in special schools** - to date, WG has asked Careers Wales to make the offer of TWE to mainstream schools. However, some learners in special schools may also benefit from a TWE placement. As learners in special schools would typically require specific support while on placement, it may prove more difficult to identify employers able to offer suitable placements. If a suitable placement is sourced, the learner might also need a greater level of support from Careers Wales to sustain and get the most from the placement.



In terms of costings for these additional groups identified above, a mainstream cost for 1 TWE is approximately £756 as referenced against point 1, the 3 groups above would require additional support so an estimated cost would be £800 per placement.

3. What would be the approximate cost of Careers Wales providing a Wales wide work experience matching and placing service to all year 11 pupils, including the administration of assessing any required DBS, insurance and health and safety measures?

There is extensive evidence from schools, employers, learners, and their parents/carers, that more access to work experience (WEX) would be welcomed. Until 2015, Careers Wales had a remit to 'place' all KS4 learners in block WEX which involved providing schools with access to a database of health and safety vetted placements.

Since 2015, Estyn thematic reports have shown that the number of young people accessing WEX has declined significantly. Health and safety, as well as time and administrative burdens, appear to be key barriers for schools.

In recent years, Careers Wales has consistently highlighted the need for a detailed feasibility study to assess the demand from schools for a centralised work experience matching and placement service, including health and safety support. The discontinuation of this centralised service in 2015, the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales, and the current variability in WEX provision across schools all underscore the need for greater clarity and direction.

In the absence of a detailed feasibility study, we plan to gather insight through a WEX survey, which will be issued to mainstream secondary schools as part of our Partnership Agreement negotiations in summer 2025. We will be asking schools:

- If they currently offer structured WEX in KS4? If no, why not? If yes, what format does it take – block, tailored, virtual, other?
- Does anyone help them to facilitate WEX?
- Does WEX have a role to play in the new curriculum?
- What format of WEX would be best in the future?
- Would they be interested in an organisation like Careers Wales managing WEX centrally? If yes, would they want a full placing service or a database of vetted placements to self-serve?

The survey is available at the following link: <https://forms.office.com/e/nwwGBtvZqS>



By August 2025, we envisage having a much better understanding of the current situation and what support schools may want in relation to WEX going forward.

There are however some important points to consider before reinstating any potential block WEX programme:

- Careers Wales last delivered a block WEX programme in 2015. The post-Covid economic situation in terms of hybrid working could present new challenges to sourcing placements.
- Our bank of WEX placements had been built over many years. Having not delivered block WEX for 10 years, we would essentially be starting from a very low base in terms of employers that are realistically prepared to offer placements. Similarly, we had arrangements agreed with all schools as a means of staggering placement dates (although most wanted learners to go on WEX at the end of the summer term) – similar negotiations would need to take place across Wales.
- We would also need to consider the level of health and safety vetting required, both legally and to satisfy the needs of schools. Guidance from WG to schools in 2015 made it clear that employer liability insurance was the only requirement to place a learner, but schools (and local authorities) appear to favour stricter measures, and we would need to ascertain minimum requirements. Up to 2015, our database of employers included high risk employers (vetted annually), medium risk (vetted biannually) and low risk (vetted every 3 years). If we were to operate a similar system, we would need significant investment of time and resource during the first three years of operation to re-build this bank of vetted employers.

High level costs for delivering WEX is provided below, however, we would recommend a need for further discussion around this area of work and a clear strategy before we are able to provide exact and detailed costs.

A model where we would aim to place 90% of the KS4 cohort would equate 31,297 placements in a year. This would require a team of health and safety vetting officers or BEAs who would deliver 517 placements each year. The cost of this model would be in the region of £2,260,549. There would be additional costs for developing a central database. This could be an adaptation of our current Education and Business Exchange at an estimated cost of £150,000.

NB These costs are likely to reduce each year as more employers are sourced, and health and safety vetted e.g. the number of in-person visits would reduce and BEAs would be likely to increase their daily 'output' of placings.



This model assumes that Careers Wales take full responsibility for the ‘placing’ of young people in WEX. If schools were prepared to undertake the placing function themselves using a functional WEX database provided by Careers Wales, the costs of delivering the service could be reduced. Our role then would be populating the database with employers, placement dates, travel to work details etc. and supporting schools to use it. The obvious extension of this would be to encourage schools to use the database with learners in a self-serve approach with WEX as a key part of CWRE programmes.

One note of caution on WEX is that in the absence of a centralised ‘system’ in the period since 2015, it appears that WEX provision has become quite fragmented across Wales with some schools directly managing it, various providers offering a commercial service, FE colleges delivering on behalf of local authorities and some LAs themselves delivering WEX (a situation likely to be influenced by SPF funded projects in the short term).

As such, before making firm plans, we would suggest: -

- A national group with appropriate representation from schools, FE and LAs to agree the detail of any policy decisions.
- User research with schools to confirm (a) demand for and likely take-up of a WEX service, (b) their expectations in respect of health and safety, (c) whether they would support a full placing service or a database approach where they assume part responsibility.
- Considering a Careers Wales led pilot in one or more agreed locations to properly test a range of approaches and to build a more accurate picture of costs. If a pilot approach was agreed, the figures on p.3 could be used to estimate cost.

In addition to a centralised service focusing on block WEX placements, there are potentially other options for WEX:

- The continuation of funding for TWE. WG officials have access to details on the cost of this service and while it is not inexpensive due to its bespoke nature, our interim evaluation does suggest noticeable impact in terms of learner destinations.
- Further exploration into the delivery of virtual WEX. In 2021, Careers Wales entered a strategic partnership with the charity Speakers 4 Schools to offer schools access to virtual placements. The offer was not taken up by schools, and our own consultations have indicated that a virtual approach is generally not preferred. However, we are aware that some major employers in Wales remain interested in this model. It may be valuable to explore whether delivering this offer under the Careers Wales brand would increase its appeal. If we were



to proceed with virtual WEX, we would need to invest in the appropriate technology and skills.

4. To what extent do you believe that your standard offer of a careers check and a careers advice interview for every pupil in years 10/11 meets the needs of the majority of pupils across Wales and how do you assess this? What is the mechanism for evaluating the learner's view of your input?

Effective career guidance helps individuals to reach their potential, economies to become more efficient and societies to become fairer. Evidence shows that young people who have access to a range of career activities are more likely to progress into education, employment or training and there is evidence to show that those who have had access to career talks with outside speakers earned more by the age of 26. (OECD Career Readiness)

Careers advisers provide impartial and professional support to individuals and co-ordinate the range of services of the Careers Wales team for individual schools. Careers Wales focus on the short and long-term needs of pupils with an emphasis on:

- Broadening horizons
- Raising awareness of the skills required in the modern labour market
- Development of short and long-term career planning skills
- Support at key transition points for pupils who need it.

Our in-school provision offers **all** pupils a guidance interview before leaving school, with ongoing support tailored to individual needs. Support is delivered through a four-tiered model, outlined below:

- 1. Universal support** - offer of a guidance interview and additional support based on the careers adviser's professional judgement
- 2. Career Check support** - one to one support for those young people identified from Career Check needing guidance and coaching support
- 3. Targeted support** for those young people whose individual characteristics mean they may need additional support to make a positive post-16 transition



4. Additional Learning Needs Support - one to one support for those young people identified as having additional learning needs (ALN) See page below for more specific detail.

Careers Wales' ability to identify the guidance needs of learners is crucial for the development of the needs-based service. It also impacts on our ability to effectively prioritise caseloads and support learners to achieve appropriate outcomes. Career Check is a key part of the process for identifying which learners need guidance services, as well as determining the type and level of support required.

In 2023, ADR Wales examined the effectiveness of careers guidance in supporting participation in post-compulsory education and training, as well as how Career Check is used to prioritise the delivery of that guidance. Key findings included:

- Pupils with low attainment levels and those eligible for free school meals are most likely to receive guidance, regardless of their responses to the survey
- Among the higher-attaining pupils, the Career Check survey helps identify those who may need additional support with career planning.

The second publication from the research focused on identifying those who may need additional support with career planning. It explored the impact of careers guidance on the transition into post-compulsory education and training, showing that its benefits are more significant for some groups of young people than others.

The research found that pupils with low GCSE attainment are 35% less likely to become NEET if they receive a guidance interview. Similarly, pupils eligible for free school meals are 39% less likely to become NEET with access to careers guidance.

After each initial guidance interview, we send a customer satisfaction survey to the young person. Response rates are consistently above average, with nearly 5,000 responses received this academic year and excellent feedback reported year on year:

- 98% of customers stated "I was satisfied with the service I received from Careers Wales"
- 97% of customers stated "the adviser helped me understand my options"
- 96% of customers stated "my adviser helped me understand more about the opportunities available to me"



Careers Wales has also set ambitious Key Performance Indicators to measure the impact of our education offer. These include:

- **95% of young people who receive guidance and coaching services enter education, employment, or training on leaving school.** Our achievement was 95.90% for the 2024 school cohort
- **85% of young people who receive targeted support enter Education Employment or Training on leaving school.** We achieved this metric with 92.80% success for the 2024 cohort

Careers advisers help young people make sense of the information they receive from schools, colleges, training providers, employers and parents. To be most effective, talks and activities should be embedded in the curriculum, delivered through CWRE. However, we know that there is a need to increase access to the breadth of information available in many schools and to ensure greater consistency in the approach across Wales.

Whilst Careers Wales is responsible for delivering statutory duty of impartial careers guidance and employer engagement activities, schools are responsible for the implementation of CWRE as a cross-cutting theme in Curriculum for Wales. Careers Wales has a team of curriculum experts who provide support for schools in this area of work. We are uniquely placed to support schools across Wales to implement CWRE and the contribution of the team, and the services we offer, is referenced in numerous Welsh Government policy documents including Curriculum for Wales guidance and 14-16 learning guidance. Discussions have also taken place to identify the current and potential future role of the team in the evolving approach to school improvement in Wales.

If this work is not delivered by Careers Wales, it is unlikely to feature prominently in school improvement plans which appear to prioritise literacy and numeracy, attendance, and well-being. As such, the potential risks include:

- Schools across Wales being unable to successfully embed CWRE in Curriculum for Wales
- Inequality in services delivered by schools with differences in CWRE provision both between and within schools
- CWRE not being prioritised in schools, and schools left without access to support to improve their offers
- Poorer CWRE programmes.



These scenarios would likely have a secondary impact on individual learners, potentially leading to: -

- Learners less prepared for the world of work with poorer understanding of work-related skills
- Learners not getting the most out of their guidance interventions due to poor CWRE programmes, leading to poor career choices and higher dropout rates from post 16 destinations
- A less prepared future workforce
- Welsh school leavers being less competitive in the labour market than peers from other countries
- An increase in the number of NEETs post-16.

5. Are there any additions to your standard offer that you believe would offer good value for money in terms of supporting learners and their families to understand the options available to them post-16? What would be the approximate cost of providing those additional services?

Careers Wales has a substantial offer for learners and schools. With additional resource, there would be scope to deliver a wider offer in terms of our education business activities, extend TWE and work experience as noted in previous questions. We would also be able to provide extensive support to schools and teachers in embedding CWRE as part of the curriculum.

Careers Wales has recently commissioned an independent research company to undertake an exercise with our customers and stakeholder to inform our strategic planning. Key feedback has indicated:

- A demand for a continuation of our face-to-face in person work for young people and adults.
- A strong desire for broad, inclusive service provision: most survey respondents believed it was important for Careers Wales to provide services to a wide range of customer groups - a majority thought it was essential / very important to provide an all-age service.
- Learners who took part in the qualitative research suggested that careers advice should start earlier—ideally by Year 9 to help inform subject choices aligned with different career paths, or by Year 10 so they are aware of the grades needed to progress in specific subjects.



To meet this request, we could enhance our offer for KS3 learners through a range of measures. This would include facilitating Career Check for Year 9 learners to assess their Career Management Skills early and help prioritise support. Schools could also use the results to tailor their CWRE curriculum to better reflect the needs of their learners and local community. Additionally, we could offer each school an opportunity awareness and decision-making group session and aim to guarantee a guidance interview for every young person during KS3.

To facilitate this offer we would require the following based on current cohort size:

Career Check	3.95
Group sessions	3.49
Interviews	32.12
Total	39.56
Cost	£2,064,775

Parents play a vital role in shaping young people's educational and career decisions. Below are a range of options we could consider in order to expand and strengthen our offer for parents:

- Offering primary to secondary transition support through parental engagement at transition events
- Hosting digital webinars for parents to enhance their knowledge, confidence, and understanding in supporting their children's career decisions—covering topics such as labour market information (LMI), post-16 options, apprenticeships, and higher education.
- Establish regional digital parent's evenings to allow parents to engage with their child's careers adviser at a time convenient for them.

Primary to secondary transition	0.56
Parent webinars	0.05
Regional Digital Parents evenings	0.05
Total	0.65
Cost	£33,925

In the current year 11 cohort, according to our Career Check survey, the number of young people looking to enter the labour market at the end of year 11 is 3,276. We would look to provide tailored employability support to ensure they are equipped to take this step and meet the employability needs of the local economy whilst still in school. This would be delivered by our Employability Coaches, over 6-8 weeks and include coaching, job searching, mock interviews, advocacy/liaison and follow ups.

Employability Coaching	14.51
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Total	14.51
Cost	£546,676

Young people with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) remain underrepresented in the labour market. In response to the *Transition to Employment* report by Hefin David MS and the conclusion of the *Engage to Change* project, there are opportunities to strengthen and enhance our offer for ALN learners. These enhancements could include:

Offering job coaching to 20% of the post-16 cohort in special schools and resource bases (approximately 254 learners). This would involve coaches preparing both the learner and the employer, learning each task, and then systematically teaching the tasks to the learner

- Delivering small group sessions focused on raising aspirations in all special schools and resource bases, twice annually
- Sourcing 254 tailored work experience placements to meet the specific needs of these learners
- Further enhance the offer of Education Business sessions for all special schools.

Job Coaching	43.37
Raising aspirations group sessions	0.52
Tailored Work Experience placements	4.5
Enhanced Education Business offer	3.7
Total	44 ECS 8.2 BEA
Cost	£2,085,722

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

David Hagendyk
Chief Executive, ColegauCymru
22 April 2025

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Request for information about the Junior Apprenticeships programme

Dear David,

Thank you for appearing before Committee on 26 March, for your written evidence, and for supporting our engagement visit to Cardiff and Vale College on 20 March as part of our inquiry 'routes into post-16 education and training'.

We have now finished gathering oral evidence for our inquiry. However, there are some specific issues that we would like to follow up in more detail to help us come to conclusions and make recommendations in our final report.

I would therefore be very grateful if you could reply to the following questions by 16 May 2025. The questions relate to the Junior Apprenticeships programme (or similar vocational provision for children aged 14-16):

1. Approximately what proportion of children in the participating schools are currently eligible for the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme? Who assesses eligibility and how? Are there significant numbers of children who are at risk of disengaging from education or training who are not currently able to access this provision due to capacity/funding limitations (and if so, approximately how many)?
2. Based on the numbers of pupils currently participating in the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme, what would be the approximate cost per annum of scaling up:
 - a. the Junior Apprenticeships provision that is currently offered at Cardiff and Vale College to all colleges across Wales? On whom would these costs fall?

- b. an alternative 14-16 provision comprising a mixture of in-school and in-college learning (for example, provision whereby pupils spend 2 days per week in college, and the rest of the week in school)? On whom would these costs fall?
3. Do you have any other observations or comments about the Junior Apprenticeships programme or similar school/college partnerships specifically as a way to improve engagement with young people who are disengaging from education or training, and/or struggling within a school setting? Are there any practical implications of delivering Junior Apprenticeships/similar provision for FE colleges' wider post-16 provision?

If you have any questions about the information that the Committee is requesting, or have any concerns about the timetable, please don't hesitate to contact our clerks at any time by emailing SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

[OFFICIAL]



Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

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Buffy Williams MS

Chair of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee

Buffy.Williams@senedd.wales

Subject: Youth Justice and Children, Young People and Education Committee

Date: April 2025

Dear Buffy,

I have been appointed by the UK Government as Youth Justice Board member for Wales and am writing given the links between Youth Justice and the work of the Children, Young People and Education Committee. Education, health, care services, and social care all relate to children who are at risk of entering the youth justice system. They are also fundamental to helping Youth Justice Services support children in the system, whether on preventative or diversionary interventions or in helping children access services to meet requirements of community or custodial Orders. The YJB's Child First approach aligns with your Committee's objectives. The YJB believes that ensuring policy and practice embed holistic Child First approaches which are also trauma-informed and rights based will help all children in Wales achieve their potential.

As Chair of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee, I would welcome the opportunity to meet you

If you agree I would be grateful if your office would contact at YJBCymru@yjb.gov.uk and I will ensure this meeting is prioritised.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'K. Philips', is written over a light purple rectangular background.

Karin Philips

Youth Justice Board Member for Wales



Agenda Item 3.18

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

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/DB/0896/25



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Russell George AS/MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Buffy Williams AS/MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

28 April 2025

Dear Chairs,

Multi-Agency Practice Framework for Children

Following my letter to you on 24 January, I am pleased to announce today the publication of the [Multi-Agency Practice Framework for Children's Services](#).

This Framework has been primarily developed for children's services but can be adapted for use in any organisation working with children. Partnership working has developed extensively in Wales over the last decade with agencies pooling expertise, support, and funding to navigate children through situations which can seem insurmountable. When this works well children, families and professionals all see benefits but when it fails it adds to risk, delays and missed opportunities for children, young people and families; and increases frustration and workloads for professionals. Every part of the system needs to adopt a collaborative problem-solving approach, which is strength based, and the aim of this Framework is to drive forward progress and success with good practice.

The Framework will be a live working document to take account of developments and changes in practice, a deepening understanding and knowledge of these ways of working; and the changing policy landscape across Wales. It will be accompanied by tools to support multi-agency practice and today we are publishing alongside the Framework, the first of these tools - the National Practice Guidance on Therapeutic Support for Care Experienced Children : <https://www.gov.wales/national-multi-agency-practice-framework-childrens-services>

The Practice Guidance steers existing therapeutic services working with care experienced children and young people to work in closer partnership across health, social care and third sector to ensure care experienced children and young people receive trauma informed therapeutic support at the right time, in the way that is right for them.

This guidance has been developed in response to the feedback and voices of care experienced children and young people who told us they needed improved access to mental health and wellbeing support. The guidance has been co-designed with

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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.

stakeholders including foster carers, adoptive parents, practitioners, existing services, children's services, academics and the NHS Executive Strategic Programme for Mental Health amongst others.

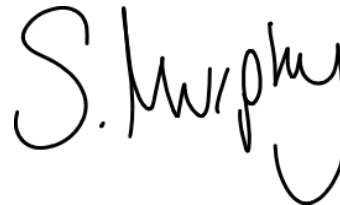
These publications today are just the start, with further additional tools and resources coming online during the next year. I have issued a written statement today to all members to announce this publication.

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Bowden AS/MS

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



Sarah Murphy AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

Agenda Item 3.19



Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Senedd Cymru

SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

1st May 2025

Dear Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee,

I am writing in support of the Legislative Consent Motion regarding the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and the proposed new duties to enhance existing UK legislation concerning child protection, children not in school, and children's social care.

The Bill will mark a significant move toward strengthening the safeguarding of all children in Wales. I commend the Welsh Government for taking this opportunity to enhance child protection measures, and I wish to offer my support to any initiatives that contribute to this objective.

That said, there have been numerous opportunities missed to legislate in Wales in relation to children not in school, despite calls from many, including ourselves, to address gaps in the provisions to ensure that these children have all of their rights fulfilled.

As a result of a statutory review conducted by my office of the Welsh Government policy on home education, my office published three tests in relation to children's rights in [this position paper](#). These are as follows:

- First, that all children in Wales can be accounted for and that none are invisible.
- Second, that every child receives a suitable education and their other human rights, including health, care and safety.
- And third, that every child is seen and their views and experiences are listened to. This is essential for the first two tests to be met.

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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.



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

The first two tests would be achieved through the proposed new duties resulting from the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, and the third test would be partially met by proposals within this Bill to require a child's home environment to be assessed when there is a request for their removal from school. I therefore welcome the pragmatic approach being taken to including Wales in this draft legislation, particularly given the length of time over which this issue has been debated without resolution so far in Wales.

Surprisingly, the Welsh Government's legislative consent memorandum does not reference children's rights and no Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has been published with the proposals. In line with the Welsh Government's statutory duties, I would strongly urge the publication of a CRIA which sets out why these particular proposals have been selected to apply to Wales (and not other provisions of the Bill) and what actions the Welsh Government are taking on any areas where they have chosen not to legislate.

A CRIA would help ensure that the WG fulfils its own duties under the Measure to consider children's rights, provide valuable transparency for key stakeholders, and assist in identifying and mitigating any unintended consequences.

I look forward to seeing the Bill develop and I would be pleased to support the committee in promoting a rights-based approach through its scrutiny of the Bill.

Yours sincerely,

Rocio Cifuentes MBE
Children's Commissioner for Wales

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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 correspondence in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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Agenda Item 3.20



cymwysterau.cymru

qualifications.wales

Mark Drakeford MS
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language
Welsh Government
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01 May 2025

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Aligning future Cymraeg qualifications with the Code to describe Welsh language ability

Thank you for your letter dated 23 April 2025 regarding the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill (The Bill). We are grateful for ongoing discussions with your officials as proceedings with the Bill take place, and for our involvement in the task and finish group as the Code under Section 6 of the Bill is developed.

As your letter acknowledges, we have publicly stated our support for the aims presented in the Bill. This includes the establishment of a Code for describing Welsh language ability which will define common reference levels based on the CEFR. The CEFR is a well-established and proven framework for assessing linguistic competence. The work being undertaken to contextualise the generic descriptors within the CEFR to the Welsh language will support us in aligning future Cymraeg qualifications to the common reference levels in the Code.

Aligning future Cymraeg qualifications to the common reference levels of the Code will allow users of qualifications to describe their Welsh language proficiency in a recognisable way. It can also support learners to assess where they are on a lifelong Welsh language skills continuum and help them to see the relevance of the qualifications they take for progressing their Welsh language skills.

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Pack Page 72

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As you will be aware, we recently reformed the range of Cymraeg qualifications which will be made available from September 2025 as part the new National 14-16 Qualifications. This includes the new GCSE in Cymraeg Language and Literature (for learners in category 2 and 3 schools) and the new GCSE Core Cymraeg and related Level 2 Award in Additional Core Cymraeg (for learners in category 1 schools). The content and assessment of these qualifications reflect broader policy intent for the Welsh language, including the aim of creating independent and confident speakers and users of Cymraeg. Since the work to create these qualifications predates recent policy developments, they were not designed to align with the specific linguistic outcomes set out in the Bill. However, we recognise the importance of mapping these qualifications to the common reference levels within the Code as a way of providing a baseline for measuring future progress towards the Welsh language learning goals. We anticipate commencing this work in 2026.

As policy in this area evolves, we are aware that there will be a need to keep these new Cymraeg qualifications under review. Future iterations of these qualifications can be aligned to the common reference levels defined in the Code. We will also set requirements in forthcoming reforms, including the new AS and A level qualifications in Cymraeg to be available from September 2027, that Cymraeg qualifications are designed to support alignment to the common reference levels defined in the Code.

It is important to note that there are likely to be some challenges in this work. Ultimately, qualifications must be designed to enable reliable and accurate judgements of learner attainment. Careful consideration will be needed to manage any change in expected standards, including an increase in the level of demand of Welsh language qualifications over time. It is for this reason that we believe it is important to undertake a mapping exercise of the new GCSEs against the common reference levels in the Code so that any change in demand can be assessed. We must ensure fairness to learners past, present and future, and avoid any unintended negative consequences which may undermine the teaching and learning of Cymraeg, as well as confidence in the Cymraeg qualifications that learners take.

We understand the important role that qualifications play in helping to realise the aims set out in the Bill, including progress towards the Welsh language learning goals. For these aims to be achieved, qualifications must be considered within the context of a whole system approach. We look forward to continuing to work with Welsh Government officials and other partners with a role to play in Welsh language education during the implementation of the Bill.

Yours sincerely



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive

Agenda Item 3.21

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl
Ifanc ac Addysg**

**Children, Young
People and Education
Committee**

Rocio Cifuentes

Children's Commissioner for Wales

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07 May 2025

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill LCM

Dear Rocio,

Thank you for your recent letter about this LCM. As you know it has been referred to us for consideration, along with consideration by the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, with a reporting deadline of 11 July 2025.

We first considered this at our meeting on 2 April, and we agreed to write to you on one specific issue within the LCM, given our in-depth work and scrutiny of policies and legislation aimed at promoting the rights of care experienced children.

We are interested in any views you have on the provisions in Clause 11 of the Bill (introduced as Clause 10) as they will apply to children accommodated by Welsh local authorities.

The Welsh Government's Legislative Consent Memorandum sets out that Clause 11 amends the circumstances in which a child who is being looked after by a local authority may be deprived of their liberty and sets out the conditions that must be met before placing them in a secure accommodation setting. The amendment in Clause 11 would mean children may be deprived of their liberty and accommodated in a new type of accommodation as an alternative to the existing "secure accommodation" setting that is already set out in section 25 of the Children Act 1989.

We would welcome any views you have on this and specifically paragraph 21 of the LCM, which says:

A change to the law to include Welsh Local Authorities in the test to be applied when placing children in "relevant accommodation" in England will ensure that children benefit from the safeguards and protections afforded by a statutory scheme.

We are also writing to the Cabinet Secretary for Education on matters relating to legislative consent on some clauses.

We would appreciate a response by Thursday 12 June. If you envisage any issues with this deadline, please let the Committee Clerk know.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 3.22

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl
Ifanc ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education
Committee**

Lynne Neagle MS

Cabinet Secretary for Education

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07 May 2025

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill LCM

Dear Lynne,

As you will know, the Business Committee referred the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill LCM to us, along with the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, with a reporting deadline of 11 July 2025.

To help with our consideration of this LCM, we would appreciate if you could respond to the following questions by Thursday 12 June:

1. Annex A to the Explanatory Notes as updated in March 2025, indicates that the UK Government believes Senedd legislative consent is needed for a number of clauses, including the current clause 35 and Schedule 2 (previously clause 30 and Schedule 1 using the numbering in the LCM), but no detailed reference is made in the LCM to these. Can you clarify if you agree with the UK Government that Senedd consent is required for these provisions?
2. The current clause 63 (previously clause 57 using the numbering in the LCM) provides the Secretary of State with the power to make consequential provisions in relation to the Bill, including a Henry VIII power to amend, repeal, revoke legislation, including an Act or Measure of the Senedd. We note that the LCM does not make reference to this provision needing consent, whilst the most recent Explanatory



Notes indicate that the UK Government does not consider that this provision requires consent. Please can you clarify whether you believe this clause requires Senedd consent?

3. The current clause 66 (previously clause 60 using the numbering in the LCM) provides Welsh Ministers with the power to make regulations to commence to clauses 30-35 and Schedule 2 (previously clauses 25-30 and Schedule 1 using the numbering in the LCM). We note that the LCM does not make reference to this provision needing consent, whilst the most recent Explanatory Notes indicate that the UK Government does not believe that consent is required. Please can you clarify whether you think this clause requires Senedd consent?

If you envisage any problems with the deadline for responding, please let the Committee Clerk know as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 3.23

Y Pwyllgor Cyllid

Finance Committee

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Chair, Children, Young People, and Education Committee
Chair, Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Chair, Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee
Chair, Chair's Forum

1 April 2025

Dear Committee Chairs,

Scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2025-26: Evidence provided by the Welsh Government

In our report on the scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26, we made several recommendations relating to budget presentation improvements. We also agreed to consult Committees on the documentation provided by the Welsh Government alongside its Draft Budget proposals, concluding that:

"Conclusion 1. The Committee will consult Senedd committees involved in budget scrutiny ahead of the Welsh Spending Review and the 2026-27 budget round to explore ways to maximise budgetary scrutiny in the Senedd, in order to mitigate the impact of a curtailed scrutiny window."

As a result, in reflecting on this year's budget scrutiny experience and in seeking improvements to the budget documentation provided by the Welsh Government at the 2026-27 Draft Budget and beyond, I would be grateful for the views of your committee in response to the following questions:

- What improvements would you like to see in the Welsh Government's Draft Budget documentation and subsequent ministerial written evidence? Please make reference to the

timeliness, quality and usefulness of any documentation and/or evidence received in your response.

- Given the UK Spending Review, which is due to be published on 11 June 2025, will provide indicative funding for the Welsh Government future years, do you have any views on information you would require regarding a subsequent Welsh Spending Review, either along with budget documentation or as a separate exercise?

We would appreciate responses by **Friday 23 May 2025**. Your views will then be collated and fed back to the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language, for his consideration in advance of the Budget Priorities 2026-27 Plenary debate that will be led by the Finance Committee and take place before summer recess.

Yours sincerely,



Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair, Finance Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 3.24

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: PO221

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

Copied to: Buffy Williams MS, Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

8 May 2025

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter dated 27 March 2025 to Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chef Whip, Jane Hutt MS. As the issue relates to Free School Meal policy, it has been transferred to the education portfolio for a response.

As you are aware our Programme for Government commits us to continue to meet the rise in demand for Free School Meals resulting from the pandemic and review the eligibility criteria, extending entitlement as far as resources allow and at least to all primary school children.

Whilst the commitment of providing a free school meal to all primary school children was fulfilled in September 2024, I recognise that there are secondary aged learners who are living in socio-economic disadvantage that are currently excluded from receiving free school meals based on their parents' immigration status irrespective of household income.

This is why I wrote to local authorities in November 2024 to remind them of the vital role they play in meeting our shared commitment of tackling child hunger and to consider how they can use their discretionary powers to provide meals in secondary schools without charging – specifically targeting those children from low-income families with No Recourse to Public Funds whose immigration status means there is no automatic entitlement. I have also raised my concerns about this issue directly with the WLGA.

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

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Gohebiaeth.Lynne.Neagle@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lynne.Neagle@gov.wales

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

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



Extending eligibility to free school meals to include learners from low-income households with no recourse to public funds would require primary legislation, and whilst the Department of Education has indicated that it plans to legislate for the changes it has made, currently their extension of free school meals to learners from households with no recourse to public funds has been achieved through issuing non-statutory guidance only.

In adopting this approach, the Department of Education has not been able to accurately monitor the impact of the policy in terms of its efficacy or cost and given the very difficult decisions that have been made in setting the Welsh Government budget for 2025-26, pursuing a similar policy position in Wales in the absence of reliable data about the potential impacts, is not under consideration at this time.

However, I am aware that my recent communication to local authorities on the use of discretionary powers to provide meals without charging may not be having the desired effect. I am deeply concerned about this.

I have therefore asked my officials for urgent advice on what more can be done to support local authority efforts to identify and support NRPF learners in need of a meal, to understand and remove barriers that may be preventing these learners from accessing support, as well as maximising opportunities for the collection of data that can be used to reliably inform and monitor future policy decisions about support for NRPF learners in the longer term.

I will provide a further update to the Committee as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

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

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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

Agenda Item 3.25

Y Pwyllgor Cyllid

Finance Committee

Chair, Children, Young People, and Education Committee
Chair, Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
Chair, Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Chair, Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Chair, Local Government and Housing Committee

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9 May 2025

Dear Committee Chairs,

Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026-27: Engagement

At our meetings on 12 March and 30 April 2025, the Finance Committee (the Committee) considered its programme of engagement for the forthcoming Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2026-27. I am writing to Chairs of subject committees to share our thinking. The Committee has agreed to undertake a number of engagement activities prior to the publication of the Draft Budget later this year. These include, a stakeholder event, focus groups held with the general public, and various other approaches to gather the views of young people.

Stakeholder Event: Bangor

This year's stakeholder event will take place at the Huw Owen Hall, Management Centre at Bangor University on Thursday 19 June. This will be an opportunity for the Committee to hear directly from interested organisations/individuals on the expected Draft Budget proposals, as well as their views on the Welsh Government's approach to setting the budget and prioritising resources. As cross-Committee engagement with stakeholders on the budget is crucial to effective scrutiny, I would like to invite Committee Chairs or a Member of your Committee to join the event. If Chairs or Members are interested in attending, please contact the clerking team seneddfinance@senedd.wales by 23 May.

Citizen engagement focus groups with the Welsh public

On behalf of the Committee, the Senedd's Citizens Engagement Team will be holding a series of focus groups on the Draft Budget with the Welsh public. The team has undertaken similar exercises over the past few years and the aim of this work is to form a cross-sectional study to allow the Committee to monitor perspectives and attitudes over time. Participants will be sourced through similar partner organisations to cover the same demographics as last year, and groups will be organised to focus on particular policy areas. The Citizens Engagement Team will circulate the dates of sessions to all Committees, should any Members wish to participate. In addition, there will be opportunities for individuals to share their views with Members of the Committee at the Urdd National Eisteddfod, the National Eisteddfod and at the Royal Welsh Show. This will allow an opportunity for Members to hear first-hand from the citizens of Wales where spending should be prioritised.

Youth Engagement

To further complement our engagement work, the Committee will hold a workshop with Members of the Youth Parliament (WYP). In previous years it was extremely informative to hear openly from young people about the issues concerning and directly affecting them. We are keen to continue building on this invaluable work and will be inviting the youth Members to participate in a workshop again this year.

We have also decided to invite Members of the WYP to participate in one of our Committee meetings in the Autumn term. Further details will be confirmed in due course.

Finance Committee Plenary Debate on the Welsh Government spending priorities

The Committee intends to hold a Plenary debate on Wednesday 16 July on the Welsh Government's spending priorities for 2026-27. The outcomes of our engagement work will inform and feed into this debate, which will provide the best opportunity to influence the Welsh Government spending priorities before the Draft Budget is published later in the year. As ever, we would very much welcome the participation of Committee Chairs, as well as other Members, as part of this debate, to ensure that the Welsh Government's spending plans are informed by the views and priorities of Senedd Committees.

Approach to budget scrutiny

I will shortly be writing to Chairs, with regard to the Committee's approach to budget scrutiny, including information on the consultation and timetable once the Trefnydd has notified the Business Committee of the Draft Budget publication dates before the summer recess.

If you have any questions about any aspect of the Draft Budget process, please feel free to contact me or the Clerk to the Finance Committee, Owain Roberts, 0300 200 6388, seneddfinance@senedd.wales.

Yours sincerely,



Peredur Owen Griffiths
Chair, Finance Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

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

Delyth Jewell MS,
Chair,
Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International
Relations Committee

29 April 2025

Dear Buffy,

Petitions on Higher Education funding and sustainability of the sector

The Petitions Committee met on 28 April and agreed to bring your attention to five petitions demonstrating the strength of public feeling about actions Welsh Universities are taking in response to the financial pressures they face. I hope this is helpful to inform your scrutiny of the work of Medr, and of the Higher Education sector in Wales. I am also copying this letter to the Chair of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee, as one of the petitions relates to music education which is within that Committee's remit.

P-06-1507 We call on UWTSD and the Welsh Government to create a viable, sustainable plan for the long-term future of Lampeter campus

This petition was considered on 10 March and closed - I wrote on 24 March to highlight it with you.

P-06-1509 Fund music education for future generations in the "land of song"

This petition relates to the planned closure of Cardiff University's Music department. Submitted by Eluned Parrott, it closed on 31 March having collected 1,290 signatures and was considered by the Petitions Committee on 28 April 2025.

The following three petitions are currently still open, and due for future Committee consideration, having received over 250 signatures:

Reverse the Closure of Post Grad Counselling and Psychotherapy Courses at University of South Wales

Submitted by Kelsey Young, currently 583 signatures and closing on 30 April 2025.

Enable Cardiff University to keep the Nursing degree course

Submitted by Cerys Flavey, currently 7,557 signatures and due to close on 29 July 2025.

Help Cardiff University to keep their Modern Languages degree courses

Submitted by Christine Margrave, currently 2,513 signatures and due to close on 2 August 2025.

I would be grateful if you could send any response by e-mail to the clerking team at petitions@senedd.wales.

Yours sincerely



Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.





The Open
University
Y Brifysgol
Agored

Buffy Williams MS
Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Senedd

By email

Date: 2 April 2025

Dear Chair,

Re: Issues facing the higher education sector

Thank you for your letter of 12 March 2025 requesting information about the challenges that we are facing, along with our colleagues across the higher education sector.

You will be aware that there are several common challenges affecting all nine of Wales' universities. There are also challenges that are unique to individual institutions. Your committee's inquiry is an important opportunity to bring these issues to the fore.

In your letter, you asked three specific questions. I will respond to these in turn and provide some wider reflections which I hope will be of use to the committee. We would

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a Saesneg ac ni fydd gohebu gyda ni yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi. | We welcome correspondence in Welsh and in English and corresponding with us in Welsh will not lead to delay.

Ymgorfforir y Brifysgol Agored drwy Siarter Frenhinol (RC 000391), sef elusen eithriedig yng Nghymru a Lloegr ac elusen gofrestredig yn yr Alban (SC 038302). Awdurdodir a rheoleiddir y Brifysgol Agored gan yr Awdurdod Ymddygiad Ariannol mewn perthynas â'i gweithgaredd eilradd o froceru credyd. | The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.

The Open University in Wales

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be very happy to give additional oral evidence to the committee as part of its work on this issue.

1. Overview of the financial challenges facing The Open University in Wales with reference to key data that underpins this assessment

Context

The Open University, established by Royal Charter, operates across all four nations of the UK, as well as in the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere. The Open University in Wales is not a separate legal entity; it is part of The Open University.

The Open University in Wales receives funding from Medr and is regulated on that basis, but as part of The Open University, our principal regulator is the Office for Students.

In 2022/23, The Open University introduced a plan to return to surplus by 2026/27, which set a range of cost saving and efficiency targets across the whole organisation. Further savings targets are in place for 2025/26 and 2026/27. These savings will also help us protect our reserves, some £150 million of which has already been used in recent years.

A voluntary severance scheme is now open across the whole Open University.

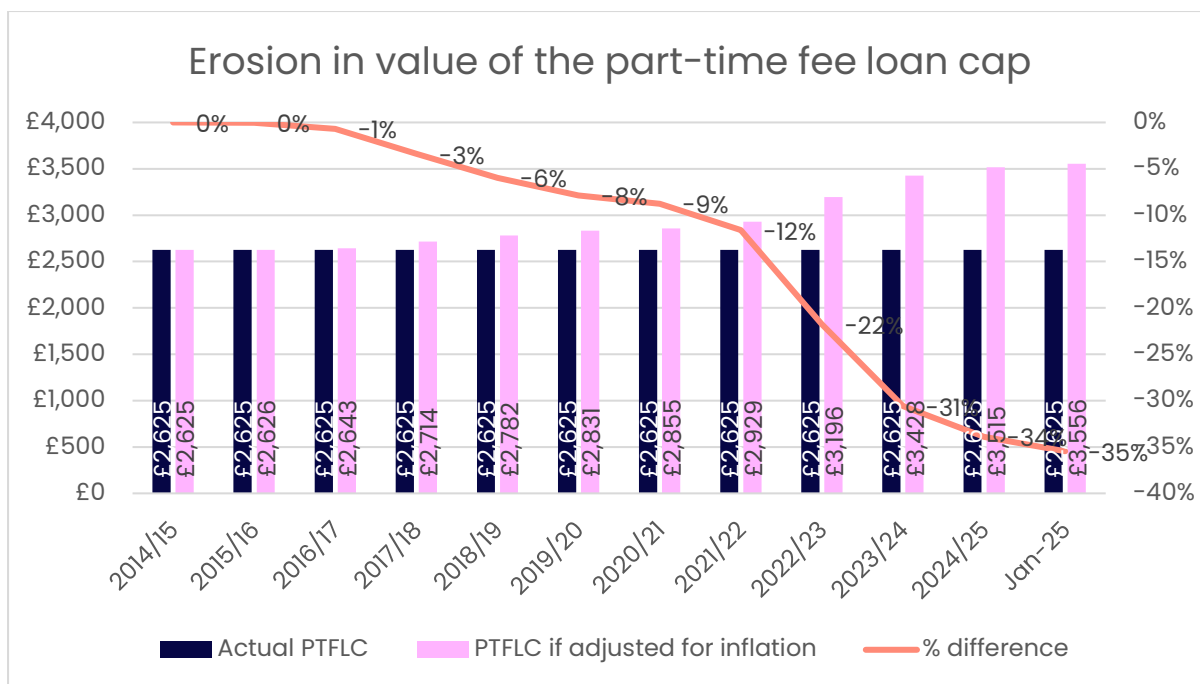
More information about the financial position of The Open University is available in our most recent financial statement on [our website](#).

1.1. Part-time fee loan cap

One of the main issues we are concerned about is the part-time fee loan cap. This is the maximum amount students can borrow to fund part-time study. The cap has been set at £2,625 since it was introduced in 2014/15.

It is legally possible to charge fees that are above the cap for part-time study as the fee is unregulated. We have chosen not to do this because it would mean students self-funding any amount above the borrowing limit. We are concerned about the effect that would have on participation among the most financially underprivileged students.

Because the cap has failed to keep pace with inflation, its value has eroded significantly since 2014/15. By January 2025, its value had fallen 35%, or £931 since it was set.



The Open University in Wales has delivered significant growth in part-time higher education (142% increase in the number of full-time equivalent undergraduates between 2017/18 and 2023/24, i.e. we have more than doubled our students), particularly in some of Wales' most underprivileged communities.

Given our financial challenges, our ability to continue reaching, recruiting and supporting more students, especially those from the most underprivileged communities, is coming under increasing pressure.

The committee will also be aware that the full-time fee limit has been increased twice in recent years, bringing in more than £50 million additional funding to the full-time sector from September 2025.

In 2023, the then-Minister for Education and Welsh Language Jeremy Miles MS said: "[The Welsh Government] will explore what more we can do to ensure the part time loan cap in Wales supports our aim of widening access to the broadest range of part time courses. Work will start on that shortly."¹

By March 2025, limited progress had been achieved. You will have seen that the Minister for Further and Higher Education committed in her written statement on the higher education reform programme on 3 March 2025 to "exploring an increase in the part-time fee loan to ensure that universities can continue to deliver sustainably and learners can continue to access part-time opportunities."²

¹ <https://www.gov.wales/we-do-best-when-we-collaborate>

² <https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-update-higher-education-reform-programme>

For The Open University in Wales, it is essential that an uplift of the fee is achieved. The fee as it stands does not cover the cost of learning and teaching. We are equally keen that this does not jeopardise progress and participation for the most vulnerable. If an uplift is not achieved, we will have no choice but to consider setting our fees at a level above the cap from 2026–27.

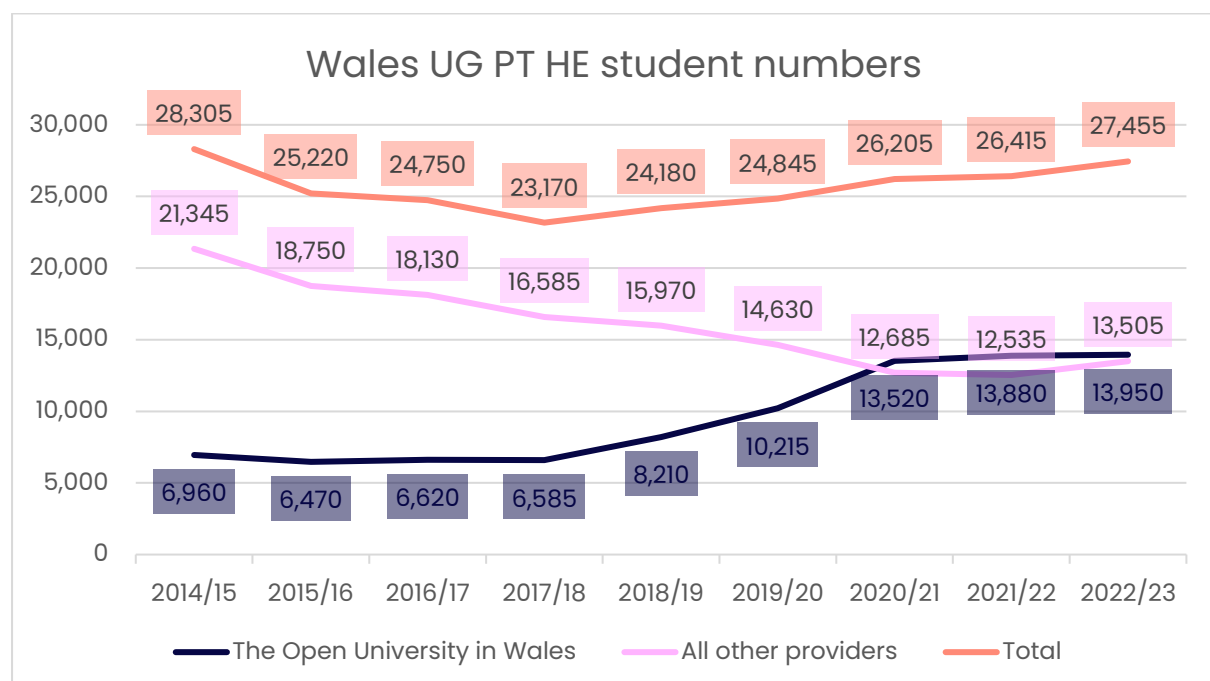
1.2. Institutional funding

The committee will wish to consider the real-terms erosion of institutional funding for part-time provision during the last decade.

Total learning and teaching funding for part-time provision increased from some £30.4 million in 2014/15 to some £34.6 million in 2024/25. This represents a 17.1% reduction in real terms; had funding have kept pace with inflation, it would have reached more than £40.7 million in 2024/25.

The failure of funding to keep pace with inflation means that cumulative funding during the period 2014/15–2024/25 is 12.8% or £42.2 million short in real terms. Expressed on a per student basis, funding is down 7.33% in real terms.

As previously noted, during the same period The Open University in Wales has delivered substantial growth in student numbers. This should be considered alongside the prevailing trend in the rest of the HE sector.



The Diamond Review in 2016 recommended learning and teaching funding of £61 million (equivalent to £81.3 million in 2024). The failure to deliver this recommendation

in the intervening period means that funding for part-time provision has been cumulatively short of the recommendation by some £350 million or 129% in real terms.

The underfunding of part-time provision was recognised by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales as part of its three-stage teaching funding review before its dissolution last year. It conceded that part-time provision had been underfunded but determined that it could not address that underfunding within its budget envelope at the time without destabilising other parts of the sector.

Meanwhile, there has been a growing tendency to allocate additional in-year funding and short-term funding to meet new ministerial priorities, e.g. capital projects. While any additional funding is welcome under the circumstances, it is important that the committee understand that these types of funding do not offer a resolution to the long-term challenge of diminished learning and teaching funding.

As part of the Welsh Government's evaluation of the 'Diamond reforms', it is essential that the demand-side reforms are maintained, especially equitable maintenance support for part-time students. These have been transformational in terms of student access and participation, as recognised several times by successive education ministers.

The Diamond Review's recommendations for how the supply side is funded has not been delivered. The imbalance of stimulating the demand side while offering no additional support to the supply side has now reached the limit of its sustainability.

We submit to the committee that the part-time sector should be represented as part of that evaluation, given its importance to the wider agenda. We would welcome the committee's support in that regard.

2. Specific Wales or UK government policies that have significantly impacted The Open University in Wales' ability to operate sustainably

As described at length above, the most significant immediate issue we face relates to the part-time fee loan cap and implications for funding and student participation. Funding for part-time provision has fallen in real terms sharply over the last decade. This has had the effect of squeezing the amount of resource that is available for learning and teaching.

Provision of part-time teaching across Wales has reduced across most providers in recent years. The committee may wish to make enquiries with other providers directly, but it is our belief that this is because it is not financially viable to maintain this kind of provision in a Wales-only context.

For The Open University in Wales, we have been supported by The Open University at large, benefiting from economies of scale and shared curriculum across the whole University. Given the financial position of The Open University overall, this position is no longer sustainable. Action is required if the Welsh Government and Medr want to sustain delivery even at current levels, and certainly if expansion is desirable as has been set out in various fora.

The committee will be aware that Medr has a statutory duty to promote lifelong learning. We believe that, alongside learning at lower levels, part-time higher education is crucial to achieving this duty. We therefore submit to the committee that resolving this challenge is essential in order for Medr to deliver on its legal responsibilities.

The rise to employer National Insurance contributions will place an additional burden on us in what is already a challenging financial environment. It is cited as a factor in the University's decision to implement additional savings targets in the next two academic years.

3. Change that have already been made in recent years to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing The Open University in Wales

The Open University in Wales has been able to sustain growth in recent years because we are part of the wider Open University and have therefore benefited from economies of scale and shared curriculum across the UK.

Our ability to do this is coming under strain given the financial position of The Open University. The part-time student market in England has declined and is expected to continue to decline. This, together with increased employer National Insurance contributions, means we are currently forecasting an operating deficit of £10 million across The Open University in the current 2024-25 financial year, before investments and restructuring costs.

We have an active voluntary severance scheme in place throughout 2025. This follows similar schemes operated in previous years, which led to some 5% of our workforce across the UK leaving the organisation. Voluntary severance is an enabler to support a wider strategy to make our operations more efficient.

We have significantly grown our student numbers since the reform of the student finance system in 2018. We are proud that many of our new students come from some of Wales' most underprivileged communities. A large proportion are people who would not be able to consider entering higher education were it not for the options The Open University in Wales is uniquely positioned to offer. This is a crucial contribution to the Welsh Government's efforts to strengthen Wales' economy, make our communities more cohesive and resilient, and end poverty.

We have chosen to keep our fees at a level that means students can access a student loan for the full amount. If the Welsh Government is unable to deliver an uplift to the part-time fee loan cap, we will have no choice but to consider setting our fees for 2026/27 at a level above the cap to attempt to cover our costs

Conclusion

We face an extremely challenging financial environment. The committee will note that while the challenges we face are different to those facing the much larger full-time sector, they are no less difficult. In any case, addressing the challenges we are all facing requires a whole-system approach.

We are pleased that the Minister for Further and Higher Education is seeking to work with the Baroness Smith of Malvern on this agenda. Ensuring coherence between the Welsh and English systems, while respecting that higher education is devolved, will be of particular importance to us as a four nations institution. We would welcome clarity on the extent to which it is expected that this joint work will lead to changes to funding.

From our engagements with the Minister for Further and Higher Education, it is our understanding that the Welsh Government does want people to continue to learn flexibly and to increase access to this opportunity across Wales. This is further reflected in the establishment of Medr and reflected in its statutory duties.

The creation of Medr is an opportunity for us all to think differently and more creatively about how we deliver tertiary education in this country. Our system should promote much more flexible and modular study, lifelong learning, clear horizontal and vertical pathways, and credit transfer. All of these would be good for learners, good for communities, and good for the economy. The funding system we have does not sufficiently enable nor encourage this.

I hope that this letter will be of use in informing the committee's considerations. I would be pleased to attend the committee to give further evidence or discuss this submission, if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Lewis', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ben Lewis
Director, The Open University in Wales

Agenda Item 3.28

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



Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

Vice-Chancellor's Office
Swyddfa'r Is-Ganghellor

Issued electronically only c/o: seneddchildren@senedd.wales

Wednesday 9th April 2025

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter dated 12th March 2025, and for affording us the opportunity to offer evidence in writing in advance of the Children, Young People and Education session on 3rd July 2025.

We have provided detailed responses to each of your questions below, but would of course be very happy to provide any further information as is helpful:

- 1. An overview of your assessment of the financial challenges facing Swansea University, with reference to key data that underpins this assessment (e.g. current and projected student numbers, take-up rates, levels of reserves, etc) for both the coming financial year and the longer term picture;**

Swansea University reported an underlying operating deficit of £15.0m for the year ended 31 July 2024. This was a planned deficit, agreed by our Council, as part of a three-year Financial Sustainability Programme implemented from August 2023 to rebalance our income and expenditure. This also resulted in a planned breach of one of three covenants in relation to our EIB borrowing but a Waiver and Amendment Letter had already been negotiated with them.

The University's liquidity has been strong over the last three years and cash at 31 July 2024 was £121m, which represented 121 days of expenditure. This level of liquidity is providing us with a degree of flexibility as we consider the longer-term impact on our financial position of the continuing financial challenges facing us and the sector.

While our financial statements for 2023/24 reflected a further increase in tuition fee income of 7% compared to 2022/23, we have seen a significant reduction in overseas recruitment in September 2024 and January 2025, compared to 2023/24 (which includes a 30% reduction to our forecast for 2024/25). As a result, we are forecasting a reduction in tuition fee income for 2024/25 of c. £10m, against an original planned operating deficit for the year.

As reflected in our financial statements for 2023/24, our reserves stand at £327.4m, of which £167.7m is liquid.

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However:

- Our reserves are not simply unused cash or liquid assets; they also comprise University buildings and monies owed to creditors;
- In general terms, it is neither possible nor prudent to use reserves to seek to address long-term financial challenges. Funds can only be used once and therefore do not represent a sustainable solution.

The longer-term financial picture looks increasingly challenging despite the successful implementation of our Financial Sustainability Programme.

Overseas recruitment continues to be very challenging with volatile markets and increased competition making it difficult to forecast with any degree of certainty, and the continuing inflationary pressures on all costs further exacerbate the situation.

It has already been necessary for us to increase the original savings targets we set under our Financial Sustainability Programme. Looking ahead as we commence work on our five-year forecasts, the volatility and uncertainty which characterise the current student recruitment landscape render it necessary for us to continue to monitor and control our expenditure extremely carefully as we seek to maintain acceptable levels of cash.

2. Details of any specific policies at Welsh- or UK-government level that have significantly impacted on Swansea University's ability to operate sustainably;

Over recent years, a number of policies and approaches adopted by both UK and Welsh Governments have directly impacted Swansea University's income and therefore our ability to operate sustainably.

1. Immigration policy (UK Government) and international student recruitment

As outlined consistently by HEIs and Universities Wales, along with the considerable wider cultural benefits which international students bring to Wales, the higher tuition fee levels paid by international students have become increasingly critical to universities' ongoing financial sustainability. These international fees have cross-subsidised a growing range of higher education activity across both teaching and research, helping to offset the real-terms decline in the value of the home tuition fee, which has remained largely static since 2012 due to a lack of indexation.

Despite setting explicit targets in 2019 to increase the number of international students choosing to study in the UK ([International Education Strategy](#), 2019; [updated 2021](#)), in recent years, UK Government discourse has shifted to include international student numbers within wider policy debates relating to reducing net migration into the UK.

This change in UK Government's rhetoric and policy approach in respect of international students has demonstrably impacted the attractiveness of Wales and the UK as a global study destination. At Swansea University, we experienced a significant reduction in overseas enrolments between 2023/24 and 2024/25, and we are not currently forecasting any meaningful future recovery in the international student market in the short to medium term. Given the increased criticality of international student fees to our overall financial sustainability, changes to policy and rhetoric in this area have therefore been particularly deleterious on our financial outlook.

To summarise some of the main factors which have negatively affected international student recruitment:

Student visa:

- New restrictions on student visa conditions came into effect in January 2024.
- Since then, only international students studying on PhD or research-based postgraduate degree programmes are permitted to bring dependents with them to the UK, during their study period.
- This means that students studying on undergraduate or postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes are no longer eligible to bring their dependents to the UK while they study.
- This has impacted international student recruitment for PGT programmes at Swansea University considerably. We saw a significant drop in student enrolments from certain markets (such as Nigeria) from January 2024 onwards.
- While some markets are traditionally more sensitive than others on the issue of dependents, this change to policy may have been perceived by prospective overseas students to be indicative of a wider 'tightening up' on eligibility to study in the UK.
- Other key policy changes implemented at the same time which would have contributed to this perception were:
 - The removal of the right for those on the Student Route to switch to the Graduate Route prior to the conclusion of their studies (which provided a level of assurance to international students seeking to remain in the UK post-study)
 - The increase in the Immigration Health Surcharge, which is mandatory for all international student visas holders, to £1,035 from February 2024.

Graduate visa:

- The introduction of the extremely attractive graduate visa route (Graduate Route) was a key factor in the UK reaching the Government's international student number targets set in 2019. However, since 2023, successive UK Governments have contributed to ongoing uncertainty about the future of the Graduate Route, through the continued threat of review and questions about its integrity.
- In May 2024, the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) published its review of the Graduate route. While ultimately it did not find widespread abuse nor any evidence that the Route is undermining the integrity or quality of UK HE, our own market intelligence has

suggested that the UK Government's decision to voluntarily commission such a review had a deleterious impact on the UK's attractiveness as a study destination.

- Widespread media coverage of the MAC review in key overseas student markets such as India, coupled with wider UK Government rhetoric around reducing net migration in the run-up to the General Election, has contributed to a growing perception that the UK is no longer a welcoming environment for overseas students. Despite a change in tone on the part of the current UK Government, reversing negative perception takes significant time.
- As recently as this week, there has been media coverage of further potential controls on the Graduate Route as part of wider immigration reforms. While full details on these controls have not yet materialised through the Immigration White Paper, continued media coverage relating to the introduction of possible minimum salary thresholds on the Route provides a further disincentive to overseas students, and has influenced our own forecast that meaningful recovery in the international student market in the UK remains extremely unlikely in the short term.

Work-related visas (including Skilled Worker)

- While the impact of changes to work visas (including the Skilled Worker Visa) on international student recruitment is less direct, it is important to acknowledge that future career and working opportunities can influence international student decisions on study destination. The Skilled Worker Visa has traditionally been one of the key routes through which international students have been able to continue to live and work in the UK following the Graduate Route.
- In April 2024, UK Government increased the general minimum salary threshold from £29,000 to £38,700 (with some exceptions for certain groups).
- Prospective students seeking to study in the UK before beginning to build long-term future careers in the country, will now need to balance the likelihood of attaining a job at a salary level which is higher than the current average UK gross salary (£36,972).
- The feasibility of an individual reaching this £38,700 threshold will also vary considerably across the UK, in line with average salary levels across regions. We would therefore advocate strongly for the introduction of regional thresholds which are sensitive to average local salary levels.

We would like to note that while immigration policy is not a devolved issue, we are very grateful to Welsh Government for their continually positive rhetoric on the benefits of internationalisation, and of international students and international exchange, to Wales. The implementation of *Taith* as an additional Welsh incentive to encourage reciprocal exchange, was particularly welcomed.

However, it is challenging to mitigate the most negative elements of the wider rhetoric on net migration in the UK, and to counteract the significantly deleterious impacts of recent changes to UK Government policy on our sector and on the financial sustainability of universities in Wales, including Swansea University.

2. Differential funding between Welsh universities and others in the UK (Welsh Government)

It is indisputable that the differences in funding approaches and mechanisms in Wales relative to HEIs in other areas of the UK have had a cumulative, negative impact on the financial position of universities in Wales.

While these debates are well-documented, below is a summary of some of the most challenging impacts of Welsh Government's historic and current funding policy in respect of teaching and research activity within Higher Education.

Teaching and tuition fees:

- We are extremely grateful to Welsh Government for uplifting the home tuition fee on two occasions in 2024 to bring it in line with fees charged in England.
- However, the decision not to uplift fees in line with England's rise from £9,000 per year to £9,250 in 2017/18, and the resulting £250 differential per home student per year in Wales, has led to a loss of around £18m-19m of fees across the sector in Wales, compared to our English counterparts.
- While the current alignment of fees across England and Wales is welcomed, we should also highlight the continued decrease in the real term value of the tuition fee since it was first set at £9,000 in 2012/13. As this fee level has remained largely static during a period of significant inflation, best estimates suggest that the fee has been devalued by around 35% in real terms. Had the home tuition fee kept pace with inflation through indexation, it would be around £13,000-£14,000 today.
- To date, UK and Welsh Governments have announced an inflationary uplift in fee levels for one year only, and not for any future years. This renders it challenging to plan or forecast accurately, as we are uncertain as to whether indexation is now an accepted principle in respect of tuition fee levels going forward.
- The devaluation of the home tuition fee is such that it no longer covers the true costs of teaching. This has contributed to our growing reliance on the international tuition fee (which also supports research and other unfunded activity) to cross-subsidise the teaching of home students. True indexation of the home fee over the past decade would have avoided some of this dependency on international student recruitment.
- Finally, there continues to be a differential in core funding to support teaching within Wales, particularly for Nursing and Allied Health. Despite efforts to improve funding levels in Wales over the years, the amount available in additional funding to teach students in these higher cost subject areas still lags behind England. As with the decision not to increase home tuition fees in 2016/17, this differential per student has a powerful cumulative impact. At Swansea University, we are fortunate to have large volumes of students studying within these subject areas which, conversely, means that the impact of this income differential is more significant for us.

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Research funding:

- As with all research institutions in Wales, Swansea University is impacted by the differential between core funding for research (both Quality-related and for Postgraduate Research) in Wales relative to the rest of the UK. It is well-documented that total research funding allocations in Wales for 2024/25 (at £98m) were £57m lower than their equivalent in England and £86m lower than those in Scotland.
 - The Research and Innovation (R&I) sector is a true example of an area in which Wales punches well above its weight in terms of both impact and reputation, as evidenced by a 2021 review commissioned by the Chief Scientific Advisor¹:
 - Wales' share of the top 5% of most highly-cited publications is twice the global average
 - Wales' citation impact is 80% above the global average and 13% above UK average
 - Wales has 3.4% of all of the UK's researchers, but they produce 4% of its research output
 - More than half of Wales's research output was produced in international collaboration
 - While the introduction of the RWIF funding stream in 2019 was welcomed, the impact of continued underinvestment in the R&I sector in Wales over successive years will now become apparent due to our inability to continue cross-subsidising research activity through international student fees
 - Professor Graeme Reid's 2020 review² highlighted that the particular strength of the R&I sector in Wales is its ability to collaborate effectively to drive large-scale, pan-Wales impact. The establishment of the Wales Innovation Network, and Welsh Government's continued support for it, is vital to retaining the strength of our research sector. However, it is also imperative that we support individual research institutions in Wales at an appropriate level, if we are remain to a truly outstanding sector.
 - This means providing research and innovation funding which is at least on par with the equivalent in other parts of the UK, and recognising the need for diverse categories of research funding support; for example the continued need to invest capital funding to support research infrastructure in Wales.
 - The need to consider the level and format of research and innovation funding in Wales has, without question, become more pressing for Swansea University in the post-Brexit landscape.
3. The cessation of access to European Structural and Investment Funds and the introduction of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UK Government)

¹ [A performance based assessment of the Welsh research base](#), 2021

² [Strength in Diversity](#), 2020

At Swansea University, we had a long legacy of securing considerable research and innovation funding and support through the full range of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), including ERDF, INTERREG and ESF.

The relatively sudden cessation of the UK's access to these funds in 2023 has had a significant impact on our University's research income and activity, which the introduction of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) in 2022 has not mitigated in any meaningful way.

Impact of loss of access to European Structural Funding

- To contextualise the impact of the loss of ESIF to Swansea University, over three rounds of ESIF (2000-2006, 2007-2013 and 2014-2020) Swansea University received total funding of c.£300m (or the equivalent of a full year's turnover). In the most recent round alone (2014-2020), Swansea University received c.£150m in funding to support research and innovation activity.
- Prior to its cessation, ESIF supported 51 live research projects in which Swansea University was involved, 22 of which were led by Swansea University. Many of these projects were diverse and ambitious in their scale, including working on clean energy and tackling the climate emergency; active buildings; legal tech; bio-innovations and advanced materials; and digital upskilling.
- Spending on these projects ceased completely in 2023, and the vast majority have now closed. The size and shape of many of these pan-Wales, multi-sector projects – and the lack of any wind-down or tapering of funding – were such that it was not possible to merely scale back activity. In the vast majority of cases, it has also been impossible to secure replacement funding for these projects from other sources.
- At Swansea University, we estimate that around 240 jobs have been affected by this funding cessation.
- We remain extremely grateful to Welsh Government for awarding £500,000 of match-funding by way of bridging support for SPECIFIC; this enabled the project to continue until the end of last year.

Introduction of the Shared Prosperity Fund

- When EU Structural Funds Programmes were developed, they encompassed priority objectives relating to research and innovation, recognising the valuable role that research, development and innovation (RD&I) has on our regional economies. At Swansea University, we have consistently made the case that for any replacement Structural Funds to be successful and impactful, there must be adequate recognition of the importance of RD&I in society. The case was also made by Welsh Government in its report: [Protecting Research and Innovation after EU Exit](#) (March 2019); a position which we supported.
- The manner in which the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has been designed and delivered to date renders it an inadequate substitute for European Structural Funding. The nature of ESIF was such that it was allocated directly to Wales based on need, which included allocations for Research and Innovation specifically. So-called 'replacement funds'

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have side-lined these R&I elements such that they no longer form part of the core objectives of these funding programmes. This is a significant step change in focus.

- While Swansea University has been relatively successful in working with Local Authorities to secure UKSPF funding (having been awarded just under £5m across the two rounds of UKSPF to date), these funds have supported small-scale, place-based, civic mission, entrepreneurship and skills-based initiatives. They have not supported new research and development projects of the scale, scope and ambition that were previously funded under ESIF.
- The UKSPF is administered by the UK Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, which has no experience of managing research and innovation, and its structure renders it unsuitable for supporting high-impact research and innovation. Funding is allocated via individual local authorities and over short periods, making large-scale, cross-regional and long-term collaborative projects challenging.
- The wide scope and relatively small pot of funding available through SPF has undoubtedly resulted in dilution of effort and therefore impact.
- In 2023, UK Government introduced a short-term, £60m Regional Innovation Fund to support universities in areas with lower levels of research and development investment (with an allocation of around £3.4m to Wales). This suggested an acknowledgement on the part of UK Government that the UKSPF alone was not sufficient to support the breadth of research and innovation. It also suggested that UK Government understood the need to provide ringfenced support for research and innovation at regional level, both to support its ambitious research and development priorities and to protect and stimulate local economies.
- However, there has been no further positive movement from UK Government in respect of a sustainable and effective replacement to counteract the worst impacts of the loss of ESIF in the UK. Universities in Wales therefore remain without a meaningful source of funding to support the ambitious, collaborative RD&I activity at scale which previously characterised our sector in Wales.

4. National Insurance Contributions (UK Government)

In keeping with all universities in Wales, our current and future expenditure has been impacted by the changes to Employer's National Insurance Contributions (NICs) announced by UK Government in October 2024, which have come into effect this month.

At Swansea University, we estimate that the impact of the increase to contribution rates and the threshold changes announced will result in additional costs of around £3.5m per annum. By way of comparison, we estimate that the total net impact of the home tuition fee increase to £9,535 from £9,250 (while also factoring in the decrease in fees for classroom-based Foundation Year subjects to £5,760) will be an increase in income of around £2.5m per year. As a result, any potential financial uplift from recent fee increases has therefore been offset immediately by the increase to NICs.

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We also note that the Treasury has agreed to provide additional funding for Wales to cover the costs of increased NICs for public sector workers (including for our counterparts in other forms of tertiary education in Wales, such as schools). However, due to the classification of universities in the UK by the ONS, HE institutions are required to meet these increased costs themselves at a time of considerable financial challenge across the sector in Wales.

5. Participation, school leaving age and Higher Education incentive schemes (Welsh Government)

At Swansea University, we share the concerns of Welsh Government and those across the education sector in respect of the growing participation problem in Wales. Swansea University has always been proud to welcome a high proportion of students from Wales to study with us and, along with the negative impacts on our nation's future in general, this participation issue therefore presents an immediate and significant impact on our own student recruitment. We support Universities Wales' call for Welsh Government to explore raising the school leaving age to 18 in Wales, in line with England.

While we are extremely supportive of all efforts to widen participation in Wales, we are also supportive of Welsh Government reviewing the appropriateness of initiatives such as Seren, given its unintended consequences in encouraging students to study outside Wales. Additionally, we feel that there is more to be done to incentivise Welsh students to study at Welsh universities. Increasing the number of Welsh students who opt to study at Welsh universities, while continuing to advocate for the transformative nature of higher education in general, will contribute to the financial sustainability of our sector, and of Wales in general.

3. The changes that have already been made in recent years by you or your predecessors to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing Swansea University.

Swansea University has taken a multi-factor, long-term approach to actively managing our financial position over a number of years. However, since 2023 the speed at which the external environment around Higher Education has been changing, including rapid changes to inflation and immigration policy, are without question making it increasingly difficult for us to anticipate and respond to financial challenges in a proactive and sustainable manner.

- During the period 2019-2021, we proactively saved £35m across our pay and non-pay budget areas through a combination of vacancy management, voluntary severance and reductions in non-pay spend. In addition, we also launched a new January entry point for select courses and introduced a range of new programmes to increase our attractiveness to prospective students.
- Crucially in those years, and recognising our increasing financial dependence on international student fees, we also sought to diversify our international student base by reducing our reliance on attracting students from eastern Asia and by increasing our

recruitment in regions such as Nigeria and India, with considerable success (although this success later proved extremely challenging in the wake of changes to the Student Visa policy on dependents).

- In 2023, we identified emerging issues with our financial forecasts and, with the approval of our University's governing body, took early action to launch our multi-year Financial Sustainability Programme.
- In 2024, the worsening landscape in respect of international student recruitment led us to proactively increase our core programme savings targets, such that by 2025/26 we are seeking to:
 - Secure net income growth of £5m;
 - Secure pay savings of £36m (across both our academic and Professional Services communities);
 - Achieve non-pay savings of £15m.
- We instigated major programmes of change to enable us to operate with considerably lower pay and non-pay resource in the future. This included a programme of redesign across every area of our Professional Services to improve their efficiency and effectiveness, and a programme of curriculum transformation to improve the consistency and resilience of all undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.
- We also reviewed our current capital programme as part of our annual business planning exercise in 2024. As part of this, we made the difficult decision to pause the redevelopment of Fulton House (our flagship and historic student experience hub on our Singleton Campus) in order to maintain cash at an acceptable level; this generated a saving of £29.4m. We have, however, also taken advantage of Finance Transactions Capital for *Digarbon* projects and the ongoing Salix funding, receiving £11.5m and £3m from Welsh Government respectively.
- We are also taking action to address the underutilisation of space across our campuses, which is an issue across the sector. Having monitored occupancy across both campuses we are considering the feasibility of a reduction in our current use of space of c.20% in future years, thereby reducing both utilities and ongoing maintenance costs.
- While we have successfully delivered our planned savings to date, the longer-term financial picture remains incredibly challenging. We continue to monitor expenditure, income and potential further changes in our external environment extremely closely, while also planning for the longer term, alongside addressing our short to medium term challenges.
- While we are grateful for any additional support for our sector during this considerably challenging period, including the recent additional funding of £19.5m for Higher Education in Wales, in year capital funding which must be spent by the close of the financial year does not assist with longer-term financial planning. At a time when universities are seeking to pull every lever to make savings and generate higher income, it would be more helpful if such funding offered greater flexibility and were not ringfenced against particular priorities, such as achieving carbon net zero.
- Finally, it is critical that in Wales we continue to take a long term view, considering the impact of emerging issues, including the changing demographic of 18-year olds in the UK.

At present, despite an overall year-on-year increase in the number of 18-year olds across the UK, many universities (including Swansea) are unable to benefit from of this boost due to significant competition from high tariff HEIs who are – understandably – maximising home student recruitment to mitigate their loss of overseas student income. [Current modelling](#) suggests a peak in the number of 18-year olds in 2030, followed by a steep decline. It is critical that the decisions we make today help to support our sector as it faces new challenges such as these in the years ahead.

I trust that the above is helpful, but please do not hesitate to come back to us should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,



PROFESSOR PAUL BOYLE CBE
Vice-Chancellor, Swansea University



UWTSD response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's request for information (12 March 2025)

An overview of your assessment of the financial challenges facing University of Wales Trinity Saint David, with reference to key data that underpins this assessment (e.g. current and projected student numbers, take-up rates, levels of reserves, etc) for both the coming financial year and the longer-term picture

(a) Challenges faced by the sector

1. The Higher Education sector in Wales, and across the wider UK, continues to face an uncertain financial operating environment due to challenges including: changes to funding support brought about by financial shortfalls; rising costs, and reduced recruitment due to tighter restrictions around international student visas.
2. Inevitably, the majority of universities in Wales and more widely across the UK have announced cost-saving measures in a bid to tackle financial pressures.
3. In 2024 the maximum permitted tuition fee in Wales for full-time undergraduates rose for the first time since 2011 by 2.8%, from £9000 to £9250. In a submission to the Senedd on the Welsh Government draft budget, Universities Wales noted how fees and funding no longer cover the cost of delivery in domestic undergraduate teaching or research¹.
4. In 2025, Welsh Government announced a further uplift in the maximum permitted tuition fee for full-time undergraduate students, to £9,535. The increase in National Insurance employer contributions have negatively impacted upon the benefits of fee increases.

(b) Challenges specifically faced by the University

Financial challenge

5. From 2021/22 cash reserves were negatively impacted due to a significant commitment of capital expenditure. In its 2022/23 Financial Accounts the University posted an underlying deficit of £11.7m. Significant work has been undertaken to reverse this deficit, including through postponing the 2024/25 pay award, a targeted voluntary severance programme, and review of all areas of spend. In 2023/24 the University posted a small surplus, however its reserves have been exhausted.

Student numbers

6. Since 2010 there has been a steady decline in applications and enrolments for Humanities subjects in the UK at A Level and consequently at undergraduate degree level. In 2021, Humanities comprised just 18% of all A levels. This is the result of a long-term focus upon STEM subjects; a focus on overt, direct skills and employability subjects following the introduction of fees alongside Government initiatives, and a

¹ Universities UK Tuition fee rise: What does it mean?

focus favouring applied practical and science-based subjects. The net result has been a steady decline in the attractiveness of Humanities degrees programmes to prospective students. This has particularly impacted student numbers on UWTSD's Lampeter campus, and has led to the University's decision to cease taught provision in Lampeter. There has also been a significant decline in the number of part-time students, historically a large percentage of the University's student body. For example, 30% of students on the Carmarthen campus are studying part-time.

7. Changes in policy towards grade and admissions criteria (lifting of the cap on student numbers, greater flexibility towards admissions criteria) have resulted in increased competition within the sector. Since 2023, some Russell Group universities and other historically higher-tariff institutions have turned to the home market to address financial challenges created by falling international recruitment. This has resulted in a significant growth of student numbers into those universities. Their numbers have accordingly grown both as a proportion of the sector and in real terms.

University estate

8. A review of the University estate indicated significant indicative costs relating to backlog and compliance maintenance.

[Details of any specific policies at Welsh- or UK-government level that have significantly impacted on University of Wales Trinity Saint David's ability to operate sustainably](#)

Cost of not raising tuition fees in line with England

9. Prior to increases to the maximum chargeable fee announced by the Welsh Education Minister in 2024/2025, undergraduate fees for full-time Home and EU students had not risen since 2012/13. Taken with the impact of inflation and a policy of Welsh-domiciled students receiving Student Finance Wales funding support wherever they choose to study, this has impacted the sector and economy in Wales.

Immigration

10. Changes to UK immigration policy have reduced the accessibility of UK study for international students, which has led directly to the current financial challenge.

National Insurance

11. The 1.2% increase in employer National Insurance Contributions, coupled with the lowered threshold for National Insurance liability, has led to increased institutional costs, estimated at £8.4m and £9-13m respectively for universities in Wales. Note also that increases to employer national insurance contribution disproportionately affect universities such as UWTSD who are required to offer the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Underfunding of Research and Innovation

12. The loss of European Structural and Investment Funds, and their subsequent replacement through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), has had a damaging impact on the capacity of Welsh research and innovation. Historically, UWTSD has been a significant beneficiary of EU Structural Funds. Our EU grant-funded projects have now come to an end. The SPF projects that we have since been awarded are significantly smaller in size and ambit compared with the EU projects that we have previously run, meaning that the University's overall grant income is reduced.

Not raising P/T fees

13. The funding support levels for part-time students studying at Welsh institutions, unchanged since 2014, is in contrast to the maximum available for students studying at other providers in the UK, with increases in support levels due in 2025/26. This

places students who study in this way (often for reasons relating to employment and/or caring commitments) at a disadvantage.

Seren

14. The Seren programme has a role to play in encouraging participation in Higher Education but is a draw on Welsh Government financial resources. It has been seen to disadvantage the sector in terms of its retention of Welsh school leavers within Wales.

Not increasing school leaving age to 18

15. In Wales it is not compulsory for pupils to stay in school after the age of 16. This has consequent impacts on the numbers of pupils going on to study at A-Level and, as a result, on the numbers of Welsh pupils choosing to apply to university, thereby exacerbating the participation gap. (In England, school leavers up to 18 must continue in education or training.)

The changes that have already been made in recent years by you or your predecessors to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing University of Wales Trinity Saint David

16. In early 2024, the Vice-Chancellor and her senior leadership team commenced a University-wide review of its activities, delivery and campuses as part of a focused response to the pressures impacting upon the HE sector and the University in the preceding months. Key to this review has been the objective of addressing financial sustainability, enhancing the student experience and strengthening programme delivery and quality.
17. The University's Business Plan 2024/25 focuses on key priorities including:
 - Review of institutional curricular offer
 - Focused pay and non-pay cost savings
 - Supported growth of expansion areas
 - Transfer of taught provision from the Lampeter to Carmarthen campus
 - Relocation of Swansea Business Campus to the SA1 Waterfront campus
 - Defined digital developments
 - Review of the University estate, associated costs and liabilities
18. The UWTSD Group structure, which includes two Further Education colleges, means that the University is well-placed to help shape post-16 education in South West Wales. Review and simplification of the structure is a Business Plan priority for the year ahead, with the aim of increasing efficiencies and strategic benefits.

Agenda Item 3.30

University of
South Wales
Prifysgol
De Cymru

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Request for Information – 3rd July Developments in the Higher Education Sector

Response from the University of South Wales

April 2025

1. **An overview of your assessment of the financial challenges facing University of South Wales, with reference to key data that underpins this assessment (e.g. current and projected student numbers, take-up rates, levels of reserves, etc) for both the coming financial year and the longer-term picture**

High Level Assessment

Whilst the University (including its subsidiaries) has produced small surpluses over the medium term, the financial year 2024/25 was projected to be challenging due to the increased costs of delivery in the context of a largely flat fee level for 12 years. This was prior to changes in immigration policy which has provided additional and significant challenge. On current and historical business model, it is not possible to generate a surplus with the relationship of cost to income remaining. Our projected end of year position for this financial year will be a deficit, but this has been reduced by actions undertaken as outlined in our response to Question 3. This deficit will grow without further action and without underlying contributing factors, particularly the low participation rate into Higher Education in Wales, being addressed at a system level.

Current and Projected Student Numbers

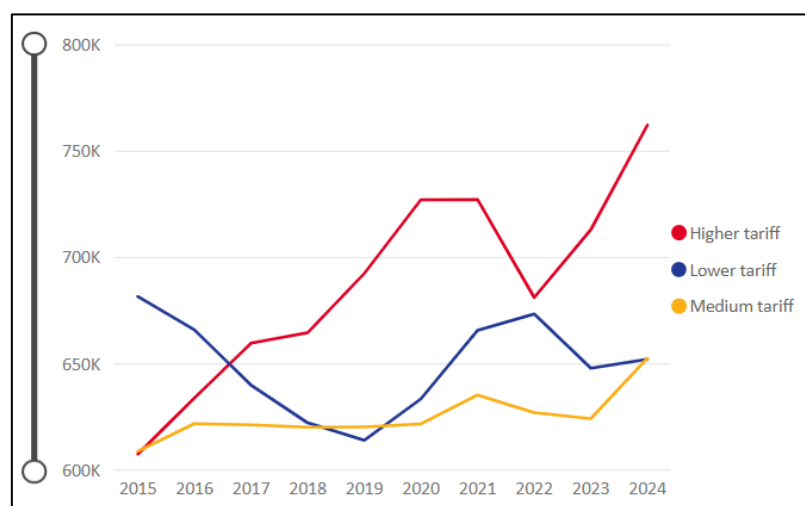
Our current student numbers are publicly available via HESA. In summary we have seen challenges in our FTUG UK recruitment and falls in international recruitment. It is important to note that the University had always planned to grow its international student numbers over time as we under indexed in this recruitment pipeline.

Our future student number plans are at this stage, unapproved by our Board of Governors and as such will not form part of this response. In headline terms, as an institution we are planning for growth, in particular within the FTUG UK market, but there are number of risks relating to trends:

- **challenges in widening participation in Wales.** USW is the largest recruiter of students from Quintiles 1 and 2 of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (51% of Welsh domicile students in 22/23 from Q1 and 2 and 27% from Q1). The proportion of 18-year-olds applying from WIMD Q1 decreased to 20.1% for 2024 entry, while those from Q5 increased by 0.3%. There remains a significant gap of circa 30 percentage points between Q1 and Q5. Disadvantaged students in Wales are also less likely to access university, compared to other parts of the UK. USW has a significant track record in this market. The university is witnessing real decline in students moving from level two to level three through its HE in FE partnerships and our progression from level five to level six has also declined. This shows that there is not a substitution effect of HE to FE, but an overall decline in participation in institutions that traditionally serve underrepresented students.
- **increased numbers of Welsh domicile students studying in England.** USW's students are more likely to stay in Wales following graduation. In 2021/22's Graduate Outcomes Survey 74.6% of our UK graduates who responded to the survey, indicating they are in a form of employment, are undertaking that employment within Wales. This compares with 58.4% of graduates from Welsh HEI's remaining in

Wales post course completion to undertake employment opportunities. A recent analysis of [movement](#) which examines the spatial redistribution of undergraduates across the United Kingdom resulting from moves to and from university shows that the South East Wales cluster 'was much weaker in terms of attracting newcomers, with fewer staying on after moving there for university than for Cluster 2 and far fewer repeat movers than both there and London'.

- **reductions in demand from students over the age of 21** USW has a higher proportion of students from these age groups – 77% of its FTUG population in 2022/23 compared to a Welsh average of 67%. In addition to the above we are the largest provider of public sector graduates in nursing, midwifery and allied health, education and policing. As a consequence, we have a disproportionate impact from these markets.
- **increased competition from high tariff universities** who did not historically complete in the same market as USW impacting on medium and low tariff universities. The following shows the change in application levels over time for all age groups. Higher tariff HEIs accepted 13% more 18 year olds for 2024 entry than 2023.



Source: UCAS End of Cycle 2024

Our future number plans will continue to add challenges to our financial sustainability without the action described in section three. Action will likely only have short to medium term impact without policy change. USW is key to driving widening participation in Wales and providing graduates for the workforce of the future in Wales. As a consequence, these patterns of demand and lowering participation, if not addressed, will have an impact on the supply of highly skilled talent and human capital into the Welsh economy. The issue here isn't just one of educational attainment, but of economic growth.

Reserves

As noted by Universities Wales Universities:

“ ‘reserves’ are not unused cash or liquid assets set aside for dealing with emergencies. In accounting terms, it simply means the total ‘net assets’ that a university has accumulated. The majority of the assets which make up the reserves are essential for the continued operation of the university. Reducing those assets means reducing the activities, services or income streams they support, which in turn has an impact on

universities' future income generation. The value of the assets recorded in the accounts may often be considerably less than the assets would achieve at open market, due to the specialised nature of those assets: the assets are normally accounted for at original cost or value to the institution as opposed to disposal value.

In general, using up reserves to address recurrent problems with income/surplus levels is not a prudent financial management strategy. Unless the use of reserves results in the university having a more viable business it will simply mean that its assets continue to be eroded, and potentially very rapidly.

Banks and lenders and charity rules typically require universities to keep certain levels of reserves. In addition, around 7% of reserves in universities are 'restricted' which means they can't be used for any other purpose.

Although it varies by institution, the overall level of borrowing by the Welsh university sector is already comparatively high: in Wales, borrowing is 49% of income compared to 34% for the UK as a whole. Covenants made as part of loan agreements are likely to limit the use of reserves by institutions."

All of the above applies to the University of South Wales. In particular, the ability for the university to invest in its future is dependent on cash balances and ability to borrow. Without investment in our digital and physical estate, the University will remain challenged in relation to the competition in the market. It will also not be able to invest in the physical and digital infrastructure required to change the relationship of cost to income and be able to run the University more efficiently.

2. Details of any specific policies at Welsh- or UK-government level that have significantly impacted on University of South Wales's ability to operate sustainably

The following is not an exhaustive list and has been well rehearsed:

Income Challenges

- Welsh Government policy in relation to funding of Welsh domicile students studying outside of Wales

It is accepted that the secondary legislative powers provided to the Welsh Government differ to those in Scotland which limits the ability for Wales to have a different model of funding. There are challenges in cross border flows with initiatives such as Seren etc. and over the past five years, funding for Welsh domicile students in England has increased with a decrease in funding for Welsh domicile students studying in Wales.

The following table shows the increased proportion of students from Wales studying outside of Wales.

Country	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
England	23,395 (38.1%)	23,865 (38.1%)	24,420 (39.5%)	24,445 (40.7%)	24,170 (42.4%)

Wales	37,485 (61.1%)	38,255 (61.0%)	36,815 (59.5%)	35,005 (58.3%)	32,205 (56.5%)
N. Ireland	40	55	60	70	95
Scotland	475	510	535	550	570
	61,400	62,680	61,830	60,070	57,040

Source HESA (FT UG Students)

- Changes in funding

The introduction of the £9,000 fee in 2012 changed the landscape of higher education for future years. Previous regimes allowed for differences in cost to deliver high-cost subjects such as STEM. The new regime levelled the income base for different subjects, which depending on subject mix, had a lesser or greater impact on university finances. It is worth noting that the Browne Review (Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance) recommended no fee cap. The coalition government at the time did not adopt this recommendation and placed a cap of £9,000.

- Gap in funding in comparison to England (£9,000 to £9,250)

The maximum fee for HEIs in England rose from £9,000 to £9,250 per annum in 2017/18. Wales did not make a similar decision until February 2024. This underinvestment in comparison to England could be argued to have provided some competitive advantage over the border, enabling additional investment in digital and physical estate and increasing competition leading to increased cross border flows of students.

- Lack of Index Linked fees

The fee cap has in effect reduced the ability of universities to mitigate increasing costs through changing income. Inflation calculations confirm that a £9,000 fee in 2012 would need to be £13,500 in 2025 to cover increased costs.

- Changes in International Visa Regulations

A number of changes in international visa regulations have taken place in the past few years. Firstly, the reintroduction of post study work visas had a positive impact on international student recruitment in the UK, with increased enrolments at USW, in particular in postgraduate markets. Conversely the removal of the dependents visa for non-research degrees has had a negative impact, with student number projections reducing. It is also clear that any future changes to the graduate route and potential increases in salary thresholds for post study work would have a further effect of dampening demand, particularly in Wales given differential salaries across the UK.

- Underfunding of Research and Innovation and associated subsidy and the impact of Brexit

The Royal Society analysis of Research and Innovation funding in Wales notes:

- 4.7% of the UK population is based in Wales, yet 2.4% of the R&D spend in the UK takes place in Wales
- HE Funding (HEFCW 21/22) was provided at £35.65 per capita compared to a UK average of £46.78 per capita

- Research Council funding (2020/21) was provided at £27.12 per capita compared to a UK average of £56.11 per capita

Recovery of overheads has reduced at USW over time and with increased budgetary pressures the ability to subsidise research and innovation has reduced. There are some variations in the challenge amongst subject areas, but largely the challenge focusses on insufficient Research and Innovation funding, and a reduction in the ability of the University to contribute to research related staff costs through core budgets. This is due to increased salaries, pension contributions, National Insurance costs and the diminished income. Significant funding streams that would have supported research have been lost in recent years relating to the ending of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) Research and Innovation programmes, and a reduction in Government Research and Innovation funding streams, which historically provided significant funding to the University. This is a sector problem affecting all the universities in the UK. Although staff are actively engaged in seeking alternative sources of funding, and major successes have been achieved, these funding sources do not typically cover high %FTE allocations for Principal Investigators and even Co-Investigators and, in addition, cost recovery has fallen from circa 80% to 56%. Therefore, our ability to cover research costs cannot be sustained at current levels. Our approach has been to close the gap within our strategy, our critical mass and our funding sources.

R&D spending by industry has also changed. In Wales, with SMEs, ability to engage with HEIs and Research has fallen. With few big industries, and those we have changing (Tata Steel) investment has fallen. The Levelling up funding hasn't had a positive impact and the loss of European Social Fund has resulted in a substantial reduction in KESS studentships with industry.

- High-cost subjects

The funding model prior to 2012 allowed for a differentiation between the funding provided for subjects. ASCs enabled STEMM to receive higher levels of funding than areas such as business and the humanities. Medr provides for differential funding through Expensive Subject and High-Cost Subject Premiums. USW has access to both Expensive Subject funding (for the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama) and Higher Cost Subject funding for its extensive STEM provision. There are challenges in the funding model:

- 'The subjects included in the higher cost subject premium are those where the cost of provision is estimated to be higher than the average tuition fee assumed received by providers in Wales, according to work done in AY 2019/20'. This has not been reviewed for some time and it is clear that all subject delivery is now higher than the average tuition fee, which adds pressure to STEM. USW has made difficult decisions to withdraw from Chemistry, Geography, Mathematics and Geology in the time period since 2019/20. Other areas of its STEM provision run at an increased risk as the gap between cost and income increases.
- The model in Wales is applied per credit, the model in England per student. For STEM an additional £6.57 is applied per credit, which equates to £788.40 for students completing 120 credits in 2024/25. In England a 'scaling factor' of 1.158 is applied which for STEM (Group B) equates to £1,737 per student FTE in 2024/25.

- The model in Wales for 'higher cost subjects' does not include provision in the performing and creative arts and media studies, the model in England does.
- In 2024/25 funding for higher cost subjects in Wales was retained at the previous year's level. The Office for Students increased funding by 2.6% for Price Group A (clinical years of study for medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, and undergraduate pre-registration dental hygiene and dental therapy courses), B (Laboratory-based science, engineering and technology subjects, and pre-registration courses in midwifery and certain other allied health professions) and C1.1 (Intermediate-cost subjects in computing and information technology, archaeology, and pre-registration courses in nursing) and by for C1.2 (Intermediate-cost subjects in performing and creative arts and media studies) by 3.8%
- Funding levels (£6.57 per credit for STEM and £3.07 for IT and Computing) mean that year on year the need to increase additional student numbers to manage cost increase is required.
- Funding is only provided on completion and therefore does not allow for students who do not complete credits.

The expensive subject funding for the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama does not meet the cost of delivery which has led to recent difficult decisions around continuation of subsidised provision. When comparing conservatoire funding in Wales (RWCMD is the only institution of this type in Wales):

- Between FY20/21 and FY22/23, public and grant funding for UK conservatoires rose by 31.3% to £7.3m, while RWCMD's funding remained static at £3.6m.
- RWCMD receives 42% less funding than the UK conservatoire average, largely due to lower per-student funding in Wales compared to England.
- On a per-student basis, RWCMD receives £4.2k, significantly lower than the £8.6k average in England and Scotland. The [Murphy Report](#) recommended that funding in Wales should be aligned to that provided in England.

- Capital Funding

Medr provides Capital Funding on an annual basis. The funding model has two principles; firstly that a minimum amount is provided to all HEIs (£750k in 24/25) and secondly an amount is provided on a pro rata basis based on student FTE. Due to the minimum threshold, USW has 18% of the student FTE studying in Wales but receives only 14% of the funding. Whilst in England there is both a formula approach to allocation combined with a bidding process, the formula model allows for subject mix – FTE weighted by price group, multiplied by specialist provider weighting plus a weighting applied relating to the proportion of students with declared disabilities. The model in England therefore considers not only the higher capital costs of delivering STEM but also the additional costs in supporting students with disabilities.

- Challenges in widening access, higher costs of student support

Funding is provided by Medr for Access but only for part-time students. The Fee and Access Plan as a condition of registration requires HEIs to spend (approx. 17% of their FTUG fee income) on equality of opportunity and promotion of HE, so funding is protected and accounted for through this regulatory process. In addition to this HEIs in Wales have been provided with additional support for both student wellbeing and

for employability which has enabled investment in these key areas. With an increasing challenge in participation in Wales, and with this focussed starkly on learners from Quintile 1 of WIMD there may be an urgent need to review how this important area is funded. It is expected that new conditions of registration will consider this issue. The OfS model allows for funding for FT students 'who are deemed to be most at risk of withdrawing from their studies because of their qualifications and age profile, and who therefore require additional investment to ensure their retention and success'. The model is evidence based and linked to age, qualification aim and entry qualification. An additional supplement is provided where providers have the most students from under-represented areas.

- Part-time fees and subsidy

As costs of delivery become more and more challenging a university's ability to provide part-time education becomes increasingly difficult.

Funding should be available to all intensities of study but is currently limited to students studying at 25% intensity or above. At present there is also a clear subsidy from FT to PT delivery which is unsustainable in the future. The challenge therefore is how the sector bridges the gap for learners who may not be able to access financial support.

Expenditure Challenges

- National Insurance

The recent policy change in relation to National Insurance will cancel any benefit provided by the raising of the tuition fee maximum to £9,535. The Higher Education Sector has produced its [own estimate](#) of the cost of the change, saying that it "will add around £372m to the sector's pay bill". This almost exactly wipes out the benefits to the sector of the decision to increase tuition fees, which the IFS estimates at £390m.

- Pension Costs

Pension costs have been unstable in HE for some time. For USW, the challenges faced (and now managed) by the USS pension scheme did not impact due to very low numbers being part of the scheme. For professional services staff, the University made a difficult decision to move new starters to a private company pension through PSS Limited, a subsidiary offering services to the University, lowering costs, over time, associated with the Local Government Pension Scheme. The next challenge is the Teachers Pension Scheme. The cost of TPS lays firmly in the hand of the Treasury and whilst primary and secondary education (and indeed parts of tertiary education) are protected by DoE funding to mitigate cost increases, universities are not protected. Without legislative change, universities who gained university status through the 1992 Education Act will continue to be required to offer TPS to their academic staff. This enables a significant differential between pre and post 92 HEIs, placing post 92s at a distinct disadvantage. The House of Commons Library [published](#) a useful comparison briefing in February 2025 which noted that for TPS:

"Every four years, the [Government Actuary's Department](#) carries out a valuation of the TPS to ensure it can meet present and future obligations. These valuations are

then used to set employer and employee contributions. Following the most recent valuation in October 2023, [the employer contribution rate increased by over 20%](#).

And for USS:

“Through the [2023 valuation of the scheme](#), however, it became clear the scheme’s financial health had improved, and the previous changes to benefits were reversed, with [member and employer contributions reduced](#).”

USS from January 2024 had an employer contribution rate of 14.5%, TPS from April 2024 stood at 28.6%. For 2024/25 the pension cost difference for USW for academic staff was £5.9m higher (as a predominantly TPS institution) than it would have been if we were a pre-1992 university with colleagues in the USS scheme.

- Cost of Transformation

It is clear and accepted that a large part of the response to the challenge is the transformation of how universities operate. Whilst there are some large challenges in terms of contract and pension requirements there are opportunities in reducing estate footprint and investment in digital solutions including automation. USW are investing in plans for both with resource being acquired to support the significant change requirement and impact for the institution. Access to transformation funding in Wales would support activities in this area and reduce the risk for universities.

In addition to the above challenges in expenditure, the overall impact of the financial challenge, will for many HEIs, impact on their ability to borrow, or the cost of any borrowing an institution may have. HEIs will run risk of breaching financial covenants. This in turn will impact on the sector’s ability to invest in the future, leading to a slow decline in asset value with an associated impact on attractiveness to the market, loss of income and a race to the bottom.

3. The changes that have already been made in recent years by you or your predecessors to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing University of South Wales

The University of South Wales has had a strong track record in careful management of its finances. Considering our expenditure has always been intrinsic in our planning and we have been prudent and careful in our financial management both prior to and following merger. Reviewing cost base and how we prioritise spend is not unusual and restructuring, including reviewing our management structures and professional services has been part of business as usual. These are, however, significantly more challenging times but our careful planning has meant that we have worked in an anticipatory way. We commenced our plans for transformation of the institution in 2021, albeit with a focus on [operational transformation](#) as outlined in our [Strategy 2030](#). Our Fit-for-the-future-operations confirmed:

- We will consolidate our estate and enhance our digital infrastructure. We have already reduced our estate footprint by over 20% since 2019.
- We will use flexible spaces and emergent technologies to enable innovative pedagogical and work practices.
- Our services will be efficient and innovative and meet the needs of our students, staff and partners.

- We will deliver timely and consistent business intelligence, with an effective data governance and management framework, to inform and empower decision making.

In early 2023 we identified an emerging financial challenge aligned to increases in costs of delivery and fixed income from our provision. We quickly introduced a Vacancy Management Panel to provide a holistic consideration of approval of replacement and new colleague appointments. We also began the work on how we would continue to deliver our strategy but through a financial lens, ensuring that our considerations would be focussed on cost benefit. Today this is our SIG 2023-2026 Transformation Portfolio which focusses on three core programmes relating to: Our Workforce, Our Ways of Working and Our Growth. This portfolio has already realised significant savings and provides a plan for future management of our financial challenges. The portfolio has been deliberately aligned to our 2030 Strategy and has been careful in how we plan for cost reduction, efficiency in how we deliver our activities and finally, but most importantly how we plan for growth. The work to date, focussing at this point on our staffing resources has already delivered large scale savings.

4. More details on your proposals to cut 90 jobs and reduce courses, as reported in February

Our current 45-day consultation which is due to conclude in May 2025 focusses on our academic provision and resources. This follows a Voluntary Exit Scheme which took place in the Spring of 2024 and a 45-day consultation which took place in the Autumn of 2024 and focussed on our professional services areas.

The current consultation considers four areas of review:

- Areas of our portfolio and associated resource
Reviewing our course portfolio is business as usual for USW. We consider courses annually in terms of financial viability and market attractiveness and close and/or suspend courses for recruitment.
- Our management of subject areas
We have taken this opportunity to consider the parity of the size and shape of these subjects and consulting on proposals in this area.
- Our academic capacity more generally
We are consulting on a number of posts in this area, many of which are currently vacant.
- Our capacity and focus of research
Funding for research has become increasingly challenging with full economic costing dropping to around 56%. We have had to make difficult decisions on how we subsidise activity. We have therefore proposed prioritised research activities and roles that align with our accelerators and Units of Assessment (UoAs), interdisciplinarity, and funding potential to advance the University's strategic goals.

5. More details on how you are consulting with staff, students, and other key stakeholders about your proposals

The consultation period commenced in February, with a formal meeting with our Trade Unions. The consultation went live to affected staff, students and applicants following this.

Throughout the period of consultation, we have held multiple meetings between our Executive Team and the Trade Unions and between Faculty Leadership Teams and USW colleagues. Student Union engagement has also taken place throughout the timeline and affected student cohorts have been met regularly.

In terms of communication with external stakeholders, this has been carefully managed through a detailed communications plan led by our Director of Communications, Public Affairs and Policy. This has included communication in advance of launch with Welsh Government, Medr, Universities Wales and local MSs and MPs. Following the launch of consultation a statement was published on our external website. Targeted letters were also sent to our partners.

6. What will happen after you have finished consulting and associated timelines (including how any consultation will shape the final plans, and when those final plans will be drafted)

Following the conclusion of the consultation period, all feedback will be carefully reviewed before final decisions are made. Outcomes will be progressed in accordance with the University's policies, procedures, and best practice. While some staffing changes may take effect immediately, others, particularly where they are linked to course teach-out, will be implemented in a phased manner.

The University remains committed to fairness, transparency, and ongoing engagement with recognised trade unions and colleagues, while ensuring decisions take into account operational requirements and the evolving needs of academic delivery.

[End]

Agenda Item 3.31

SWYDDFA'R IS-GANGHELLOR
VICE-CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE



11 April 2025

Dear Buffy,

Thank you for your letter of 12 March. I am pleased that your committee has set aside time to examine the financial challenges that the Higher Education sector faces at present. It is important that providers can act to restore financial sustainability supported by our stakeholders, including the Welsh Government.

I have set out our answers to your questions below (which are presented in bold).

An overview of your assessment of the financial challenges facing Bangor University, with reference to key data that underpins this assessment (e.g. current and projected student numbers, take-up rates, levels of reserves, etc) for both the coming financial year and the longer term picture

We see that there are challenges for the whole of the university sector. The five key elements are:

1. Home undergraduate fees in Wales have been fixed at £9,000 since 2012/13. While we can increase our fees for incoming students to £9,535 from 2025/26 onwards, there is no agreement for future inflation adjustment to the amount of money we receive per student.
2. UK universities have been increasingly reliant on international income to make up for the shortfall from home fees not increasing by inflation. The UK Government's action to reduce the level of immigration has led to a fall in international students coming to study in the UK. The new Westminster Government does not seem to be planning to reverse the changes made by the previous Government.
3. Cost increases have been significant over recent years particularly in utility bills and pay awards. However, home fees have not kept pace with inflation, which has risen by nearly 40% since 2012, intensifying the financial strain that the sector faces.
4. The changes to national insurance have increased our operating costs. For us, this will add £1.8 million per year to our costs from April 2025 onwards, which is higher than the positive impact of the recent fee increase.
5. There is a change of behaviour within the sector. Some high-tariff universities appear to have responded to the fall in international student intakes by reducing

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their entry grades and taking more home students. This has reduced the size of the pool of students attending to other universities.

These sector level challenges are very significant for us. In Autumn 2024, our student intakes were smaller than in 2023, falling short of our budget target. Our home undergraduate intake was 7% smaller. Our international intake was also smaller, with our September international postgraduate intake around half the size of the 2023 intake.

As we have passed the UCAS application deadline in January, we can see that a further fall in student intake is likely in 2025, with applications 1% lower than 2024.

We must take action to bring our costs into line with the reduced income that we anticipate for the years ahead. At 31 July 2024 we had cash reserves of £33 million, it is essential to act now to avoid these falling to unsustainable levels.

Details of any specific policies at Welsh- or UK-government level that have significantly impacted on Bangor University's ability to operate sustainably

As noted above, the policy decision of Welsh Government to hold home fees at £9,000 in 2017/18 rather than to allow the increase to £9,250 in England has had an impact on our sustainability. Had the fees increased to £9,250 from 2017/18 we would have received around an additional £10 million in funding.

The Welsh sector also faces significant challenges in respect of the lower underlying demand for higher education compared to universities elsewhere in the UK. As you will be aware, we have the lowest proportion of 18 year-olds applying for university places. In Wales, 32% applied compared to 40.6% for the UK as a whole.

The UK Government's changes to student visa rules have had a profound impact on our University and the whole sector. As I have outlined above, our September 2024 intake of international students fell by around 50%.

The changes that have already been made in recent years by you or your predecessors to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing Bangor University

We could see that the financial risks that we were facing in late 2023 were increasing and we instigated a close control of our pay and non-pay expenditure. Our close control of vacant posts was supplemented by a voluntary severance scheme. This has been a success: in March our staff headcount is down 7.8% year on year.

The University has restructured and/or reduced staffing and non-pay budgets on three previous occasions, in 2015, 2017 and 2020. These interventions were proportionate for the nature and scale of the challenges faced at the time but could not have foreseen the

continued deterioration to the higher education funding landscape over recent years (as outlined above).

More details on your proposals to cut 200 jobs to generate savings of around £15m, as reported in February

Alongside continuing close control of any vacant posts, non-pay spend and reducing the size of the estate, we must target savings of £15 million of pay costs. We anticipate that this will require a reduction of around 200 posts.

We opened a University-wide voluntary severance scheme until the end of March. The University's governing body has acknowledged that the use of compulsory redundancies may be necessary if we cannot achieve the savings through voluntary severance. We will try to avoid the use of compulsory redundancies, but we must achieve our savings target so that we rebuild our financial sustainability.

In the light of falling student intakes, we need to reduce staffing levels in particular academic schools. Each Head of School has received a data-informed analysis of their school's overall performance and market insight. This analysis considers several areas of performance: financial sustainability; Welsh-medium provision; student recruitment; research activity; student satisfaction; and graduate employability - alongside information on staff and student populations together with student recruitment trends. Using this information, colleagues are asked to assess key challenges, drivers for change, and proposed solutions as part of their business case for change.

Professional Services Directors have been given budgetary targets and tasked with developing business cases for change. As key contributors to the academic mission and student experience, Professional Services will maintain excellence while transitioning to a more efficient structure. The overarching goal is to create a future-proof service model that meets financial requirements while continuing to provide high-quality support.

To achieve this, discussions will take place with teams to outline a proposed redesign, which will form the foundation of the recommendations within the business cases. These cases are not solely focused on cost savings but on driving efficiencies and shaping a new operating model that supports staff and students in the context of reduced income.

More details on how you are consulting with staff, students, and other key stakeholders about your proposals

All staff across the University have had the opportunity to attend a meeting with a member of the Executive Board in the immediate weeks following the announcement in February.

We have also communicated with all students, and we have met with the elected student representatives, Undeb Bangor, our Students' Union.

We have been meeting regularly with our campus trade unions, and we are committed to working closely with them in the coming months.

We have written to our key external stakeholders, and we will keep them informed as our process of delivering savings progresses.

What will happen after you have finished consulting and associated timelines (including how any consultation will shape the final plans, and when those final plans will be drafted)

At this stage, no decisions have been made, and input from colleagues is essential in shaping the outcome. Consultation across Professional Services, Schools, and subject areas is critical, and staff have been encouraged to share their views and ideas on achieving the necessary savings. Business cases for change for both the academic colleges and professional services will be considered by the Executive Board in April.

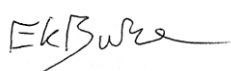
In early May, our governing body will meet to review the position reached and after then we expect to communicate our next steps soon after that meeting.

If we are needing to move forward with compulsory redundancies, we will issue a Section 188 notice and we will follow our policy for the management of change.

We are very proud of our rich history in delivering exceptional research, education and opportunities for our students and the wider region in North Wales as well as for the nation of Wales and beyond.

I am aware that the changes that we are needing to make are challenging, and we must make some difficult decisions. However, I believe that by successfully implementing our plans, we will restore the University to a stable and sustainable financial position.

Yours sincerely,



Edmund Burke

CC Simon Pirotte, Chief Executive, Medr

Amanda Wilkinson, Director, Universities Wales

Buffy Williams MS
Chair of the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

9 April 2025

Annwyl Buffy,

Re: Request for information

Thank you for your letter dated 12 March 2025. A briefing is attached to answer your questions in more detail, with the following serving as an overview. All actions relate to the period after I took office on 1 February 2024.

The sudden downturn in international postgraduate students studying in Wales has had a significant effect on finances and, like all organisations, we have been dealing with a period of high inflation. The forthcoming increase to employer National Insurance contributions creates additional problems and, as a 'post-92' provider, we are also absorbing the 5% increase in employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

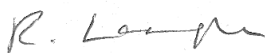
Towards the end of 2023/24, we had a financial gap of £17m. To deal with it, we ran a voluntary severance scheme from 24 April to 14 May 2024, and cut other expenditure and deferred pay increases.

Two more rounds of voluntary severance ran from 6 December 2024 to 31 January 2025 and 21 February to 5 March, respectively. We are now in formal consultation for a redesign that will seek to close the remaining gap and better position the University for the future.

In terms of UK policies, the January 2024 removal of visas for the dependents international students on taught postgraduate programmes had a sharp and immediate impact. In Wales, the decision to cap the fee at £9,000 (and to not match the £9,250 in England) was manageable until the post-covid spike in inflation. Wales has since matched the English fee, but this does not cover the preceding decade's worth of inflation.

A more detailed response to your specific questions is attached, although some of the data requested cannot be provided. Should you need further information on this or any other matter, we are always happy to support.

Yn gywir,



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President and Vice-Chancellor
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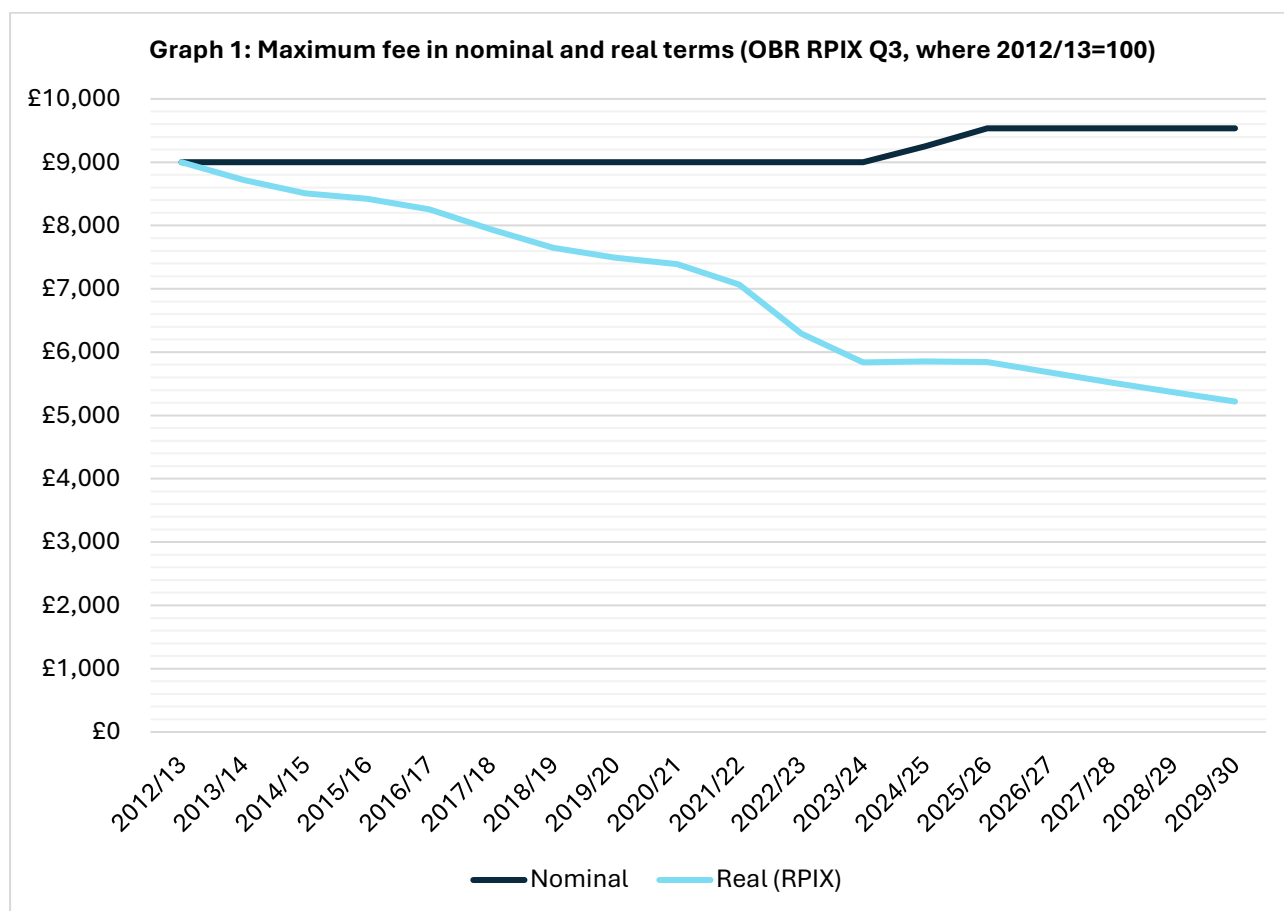
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1. Overview of your assessment of the financial challenges facing Cardiff Metropolitan University, with reference to key data that underpins this assessment (e.g. current and projected student numbers, take-up rates, levels of reserves, etc) for both the coming financial year and the longer term picture).

1.1 Some of the information requested is not available. Projected student numbers and financial information beyond 2023/24 are commercially sensitive and, moreover, the latter is not yet audited.

1.2 Universities are experiencing unprecedented levels of financial challenge, brought about in large part by an unindexed full-time undergraduate tuition fee that increased by just £250 in ten years. The recent increase to £9,535 does not reverse the longer-term drop in real value. Assuming no further indexation, the fee will drop to c. £5,200 in real terms by the end of the decade (based on OBR data).¹



1.3 This situation has been further compounded by recent funding cuts and a sharp decline in international student admissions, precipitated by UK Government policy changes. For the University, this resulted in a significant projected recurrent financial shortfall. Accordingly, the University's approved budget for 2024/2025 had a key aim of realising efficiencies (pay and non-pay) of £17m within the academic year.

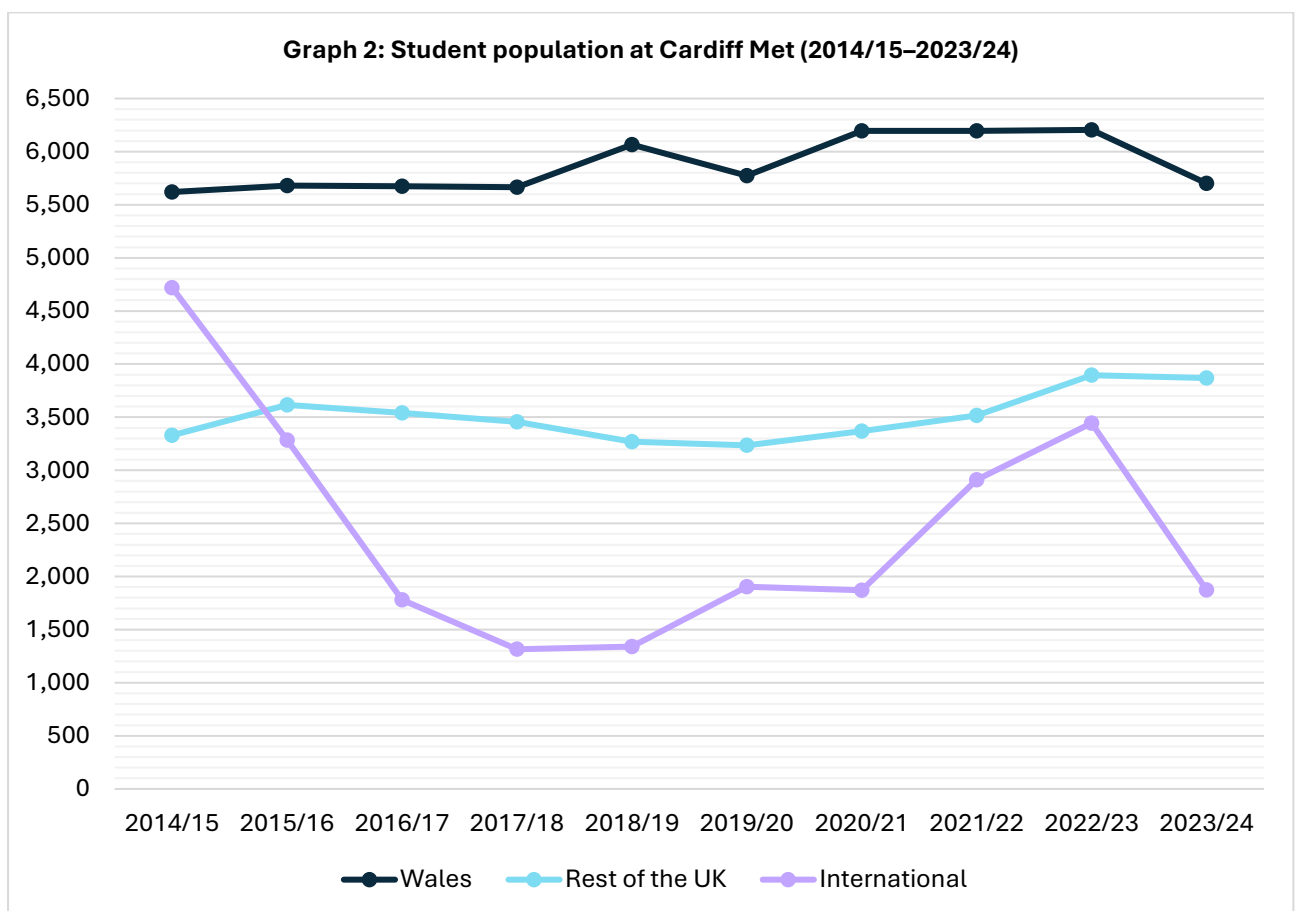
1.4 In terms of using reserves, the 2023/24 accounts show the University with £186m but the more relevant figure is the £43m of cash and highly liquid investments.² Cash and liquidity has been utilised since that point, and it is prudent to reduce it no further to give assurance of staying comfortably within loan covenant conditions and security against future shocks. Recent movement in markets and the outlook of both the UK and global economy, as well as reports about the graduate visa, illustrate the continued need for prudence.

1.5 The budget for 2024/25 was also developed to accommodate additional disruption to the University's financial position arising from further income shrinkage and continuing cost inflation. Salary costs have been impacted by high pay inflation, resulting from:

- Annual pay award of 2.5%.
- Increase of 5% in the Teachers' Pension employer pension contribution rate, which will apply to the salaries of most of the University's academic colleagues.
- Further average increase of c. 1.5% to the salary costs for colleagues on the national pay scales who will be entitled to an annual salary increment.
- Other unplanned salary cost increases, such as National Insurance employer contributions.

2. Details of any specific policies at Welsh- or UK-government level that have significantly impacted on Cardiff Metropolitan University's ability to operate sustainably.

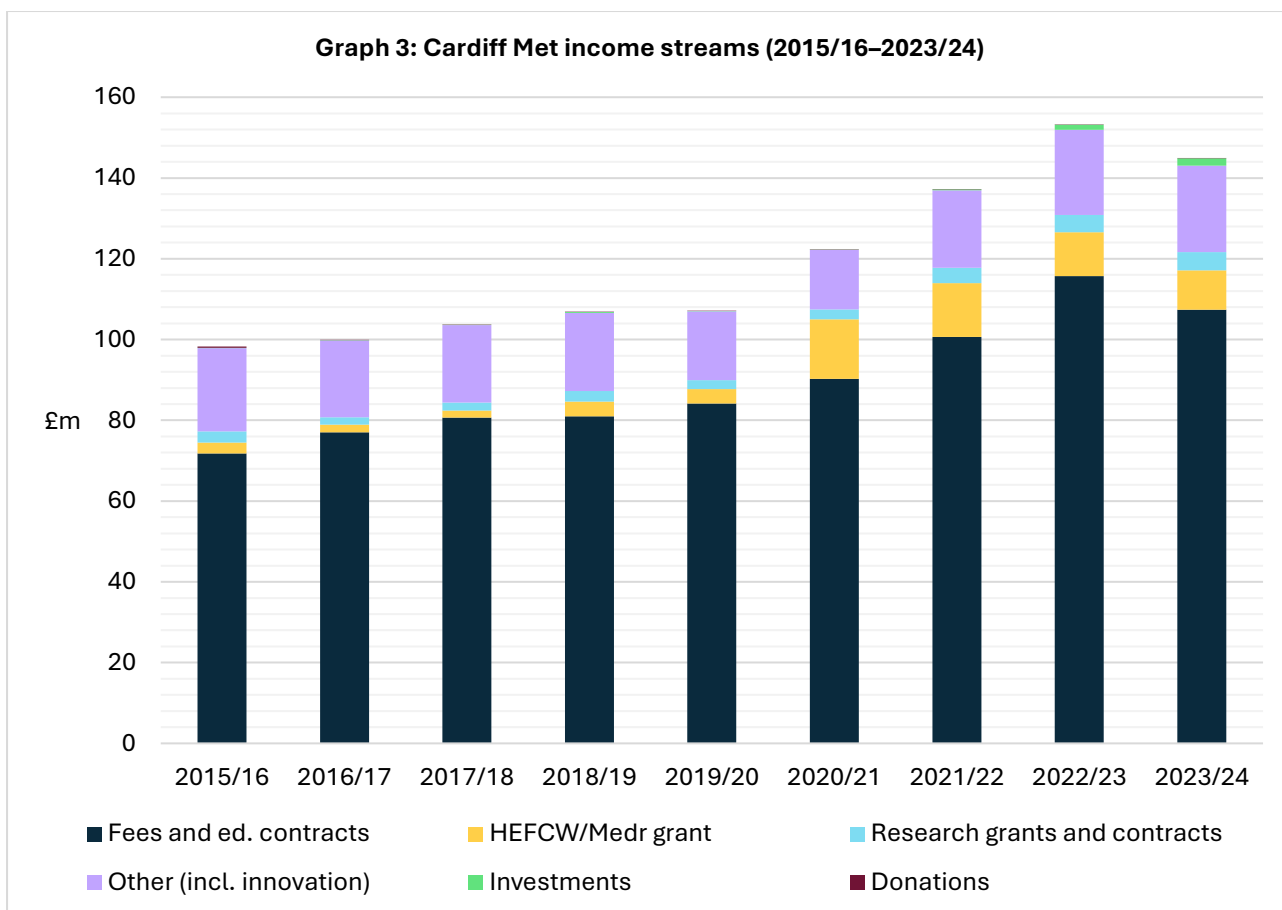
- 2.1 In short, the funding system was manageable when inflation was near the Bank of England target rate of 2% and/or international recruitment continued to grow. The loss of one pillar was difficult, but the loss of both has precipitated series financial challenges across all universities.
- 2.2 The Diamond review, which led to the current funding model said, "inflationary pressures should be shared between the student (through the Tuition Fee Loan and Maintenance Loan) and the state (through the Maintenance Grant and HEFCW learning and teaching grants)".³ The loan and grant did rise with inflation, but inflationary pressures were not mitigated via the fee or HEFCW grants.
- 2.3 Instead, inflationary pressures were alleviated primarily via the uncapped fees of postgraduate and international students. The University did not 'double-down' and ensured it continued to grow and/or maintain its Welsh and UK recruitment.⁴ But international recruitment has become important for all universities' financial models and such recruitment has now retrenched across the UK.



- 2.4 Some of this is beyond domestic control. The post-covid boom in international students had some of its origin in demand that was suppressed by lockdowns. This demand has now returned to a level more consistent with past numbers.⁵ Recruitment from some countries has also been affected by economic

crises in those places, most notably Nigeria.⁶ But it remains the case that UK policymakers have accelerated, rather than mitigated, these factors, with effects being felt in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

- 2.5 The previous UK Government increased visa costs and the Immigration Healthcare Surcharge, the latter by £306 (65%) for students.⁷ Applying for a study visa from outside the UK rose by £127 (35%).⁸ Moreover, it abolished visas for dependants of taught postgraduates.⁹ This has had a notable effect on applications from Nigeria and India, which were 56% of international taught postgraduates in Wales before the change.¹⁰ UK Government's impact assessment of the dependants visa change estimates a hit to the UK economy of c. £15bn, and the new administration has ruled out reversing the decision.¹¹
- 2.6 Other UK factors that have hurt sustainability. As above, the Autumn Budget introduced additional pressures. The increase in employers' contributions to National Insurance will add millions to the wage bill and employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Scheme have risen from 23.6% to 28.6%.^{12 13} English students also now have reduced access to loans for foundation year courses, with their borrowing capped at £5,760 for classroom-based subjects.¹⁴ A higher fee for such courses in Wales is unviable due to cross-border recruitment, so matching the cut will further hit income.
- 2.7 The longer burn was the fall in the real terms value of the maximum tuition fee and, to a smaller extent, the funding grant from HEFCW. This came into sharper focus with the precipitous rise in inflation in 2021 and 2022, which wiped c. £1,000 off the fee in real terms (see section 1.2). While inflation has now come down from those highs, it is still running above the target rate (0.8% via CPI and 1% via RPIX) and the OBR does not forecast a return to the target rate until 2029.^{15 16}
- 2.8 On fees, Welsh Government has been limited by the appetite of Westminster governments. Like Wales, England has only increased its maximum fee twice in more than a decade. UK Government moved to £9,250 in time for the 2017/18 academic year and, in July 2017, Welsh Government announced it would also raise fees in line with inflation to £9,295 for the 2018/19 academic year.¹⁷ Later that year, UK Government announced it would freeze fees and Welsh Government decided it would do the same.¹⁸ However, it would still take until 2023/24 for fees in Wals to match those in England.
- 2.9 It is worth noting that fee rises have not applied to degree apprenticeships or courses commissioned by Health Education and Improvement Wales, the second of which is a substantial part of the University's portfolio. These courses are considered a national priority but, heading into 2024/25, they still will not be rising with inflation. The capping of the degree apprenticeship budget at c. £10m is also causing considerable problems in matching supply to demand.¹⁹
- 2.10 Alongside the fee, grants from HEFCW and now Medr have not kept pace with inflation.²⁰ This has been less of an issue for Cardiff Met, with the recurrent grant accounting for a far smaller share of income.²¹ While income is now 52.5% larger than 2015/16, income streams' share of the total are relatively stable. But, given its ability to provide ballast to what would be loss-making activity, the recurrent grant should not be downplayed.
- 2.11 The grant provides additional coverage for high-cost and expensive subjects and Welsh-medium provision. Before Medr was established, HEFCW commissioned a review of the costs of Welsh-medium provision.²² HEFCW found that it could not cover those true costs and could afford only to use the language premium for expensive and higher-cost subjects: medicine, dentistry, conservatoire performance, science, engineering, technology, mathematical sciences, IT and computing. This leaves large parts of Welsh-medium provision without sufficient support.



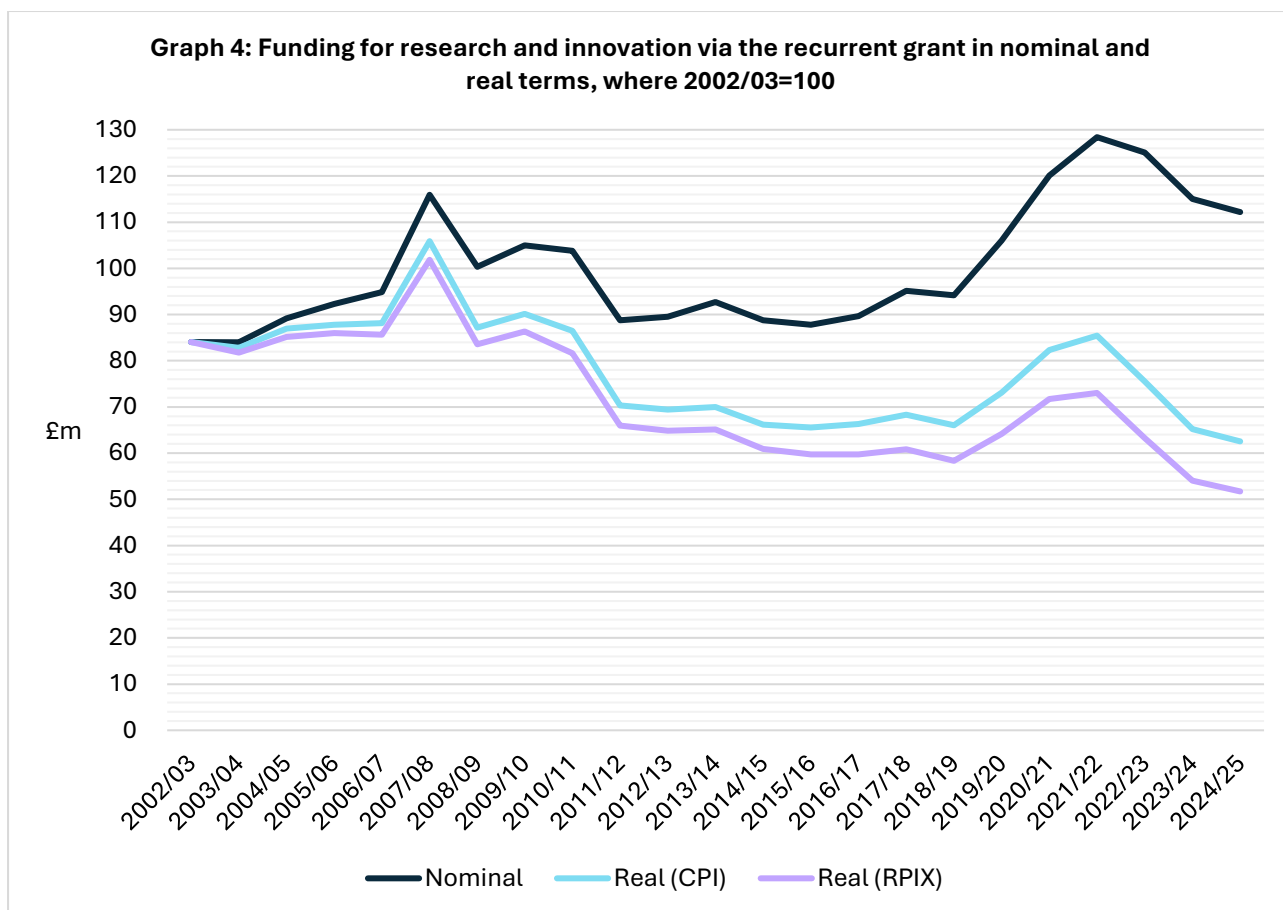
2.13 The recurrent grant is also essential to support loss-making research. The grant provides funding for curiosity-led research, postgraduate research and innovation. This is intended to secure the research base, which can then draw additional funding from UKRI and non-public partners. Broadly, there are two issues with research funding and sustainability.

2.14 The first issue is UK-wide, in that research is not funded at full cost (be it UKRI or another source). UKRI has recently looked at the matter and, as announced last month, will be making changes.²³

Table 1: Median cost recovery for research, UK peer groups²⁴

Peer group	Includes	Median cost recovery (%)
A	Cardiff, Swansea	71.6
B	Aberystwyth, Bangor	64.0
C	-	52.5
D	USW	44.6
E	Cardiff Met, UWTSD, Wrexham	44.1
F	-	68.0

2.15 The second issue is devolved, in that the funding for research and innovation via HEFCW has not been maintained in real terms. This issue predates the high inflation at the start of this decade. The situation now is, arguably, at its lowest point in two decades.



3. Changes that have already been made in recent years by you or your predecessors to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing Cardiff Metropolitan University

3.1 Towards the end of 2023/24, the University identified a financial gap of £17m. Since then, it has:

- Completed three voluntary severance schemes: 24 April to 14 May 2024, 6 December 2024 to 31 January 2025, and 21 February to 5 March.
- Benefitted from strong student recruitment in summer 2024.
- Cut non-essential expenditure.
- Not renewed fixed term contracts.
- Deleted vacancies.

3.2 The University is now in formal collective consultation for a redesign, with 30 to 50 full-time-equivalent roles expected to be lost via compulsory redundancy.

3.3 The University is not undertaking a review with the intention of cutting subjects or programmes, not least as Wales has a participation gap in both post-16 and post-18 education. Moreover, it will protect and expand those courses that feed directly into the public sector and support the Welsh economy and society more generally. The University remains committed to training workers in education, health and social care and will not damage initial teacher education or the delivery of courses for HEIW.

3.4 But the University will become an institution with a smaller staff body, so that any future growth is more efficient and sustainable. It will look to implement the fee increase that Welsh Government is due to enable for 2025/26, ensuring at least 15% of domestic fee income continues to be spent on widening participation activities.

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- ¹ OBR. 2025. [Inflation](#). London: OBR.
- ² Cardiff Metropolitan University. 2025. [Annual Report & Financial Statements 2023-2024](#). Cardiff: Cardiff Metropolitan University.
- ³ Diamond, I. 2016. [The Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance Arrangements in Wales: Final Report](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ British Council. 2024. [Refocus for UK higher education as international student numbers expected to fall](#). London: British Council.
- ⁶ Wood, P. and Butcher, B. 2024. [Universities braced for financial fallout from Nigerian currency crisis](#). London: Telegraph.
- ⁷ UK Government. 2023. [NHS staff receive pay rise](#). London: UK Government.
- ⁸ UK Government. 2024. [Visa fees transparency data](#). London: UK Government.
- ⁹ UK Government. 2023. [Changes to student visa route will reduce net migration](#). London: UK Government.
- ¹⁰ Higher Education Statistics Agency. 2025. [Where do HE students come from?](#). Cheltenham: Higher Education Statistics Agency.
- ¹¹ UK Government. 2024. [Changes to Immigration Rules: impact assessments](#). London: UK Government.
- ¹² Universities & Colleges Employers Association. 2024. [UCEA response to the Budget](#). London: Universities & Colleges Employers Association.
- ¹³ Lewis, J., Mirza-Davies, J. and Cunningham, S. 2025. [Universities and the Teachers' Pension Scheme](#). London: UK Parliament.
- ¹⁴ UK Government. 2025. [Higher education tuition fees for foundation years](#). London: UK Government.
- ¹⁵ ONS. 2025. [Inflation and price indices](#). Newport: ONS.
- ¹⁶ OBR. 2025. [Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2025](#). London: OBR.
- ¹⁷ BBC News. 2017. [Tuition fee £9,000 cap to be raised, says Kirsty Williams](#). London: BBC.
- ¹⁸ BBC News. 2017. [Tuition fee rise to £9,295 in Wales scrapped](#). London: BBC.
- ¹⁹ Cardiff Metropolitan University. 2025. [Cardiff Metropolitan University response to the Senedd's Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee's inquiry into apprenticeships](#). Cardiff: Senedd Cymru.
- ²⁰ Universities Wales and Chairs of Universities Wales. 2024. [Universities Wales and Chairs of Universities Wales joint response to the Finance Committee of the Senedd's call for information on Welsh Government Draft budget proposals for 2025/26](#). Cardiff: Universities Wales.
- ²¹ Higher Education Statistics Agency. 2024. [What is the income of HE providers?](#). Cheltenham: Higher Education Statistics Agency.
- ²² London Economics. 2023. [Costs of Welsh medium provision at higher education institutions in Wales](#). London: London Economics.
- ²³ UKRI. 2025. [UKRI updates funding policies to improve research sustainability](#). Swindon: UKRI.
- ²⁴ Office for Students. 2024. [Annual TRAC 2022-23: Sector summary and analysis by TRAC peer group](#). London: Office for Students.

Agenda Item 3.33



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Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament

Trwy ebost / By Email seneddchildren@senedd.wales

9 Ebrill / April 2025

Dear Buffy Williams MS,

Thank you for your letter of 12 March 2025 outlining the nature of your committee's enquiries.

I am pleased to be able to supply you with the following responses to your questions.

Assessment of the Challenges

Aberystwyth University has faced similar challenges to the rest of the HE sector in Wales, and a number of common challenges with other Universities across the UK sector.

You will be aware that for over a decade the Welsh Government restricted domestic undergraduate tuition fees to £9000 per annum. This figure was first set in 2012/13, and not raised until 2024/2025 when the then Education Minister increased the maximum fee level to £9250. The real-terms decline in the value of these fees over the course of the decade has removed resource from the University. The resultant position has impacted on the levels of reserves held by the University and levels of investment in facilities such as digital and physical infrastructure. Domestic undergraduate tuition fees is Aberystwyth University's main source of annual income. Therefore, the resultant position of the University is that it is not as financially resilient as we would wish. This declining position has been set out in our annual accounts over the period.

Over more recent years, higher inflation has exacerbated the impact of reducing real-terms tuition fee income. These inflationary pressures have impacted both pay and non-pay costs.

You may agree that over the decade of reducing income levels from domestic undergraduate tuition fees, many universities have increasingly relied on unregulated fee income from international students. International Student tuition fee income has remained a relatively small part of Aberystwyth's overall income over the period. While this has meant that Aberystwyth has experienced an over-reliance on domestic tuition fee income, the recent deterioration in international student recruitment markets has had a severe impact on the HE sector, but a proportionately lower impact on Aberystwyth University.

Over recent years we have also experienced a notable increase in student support needs and costs, as newer cohorts of students increasingly have additional needs.

The University has also taken on further cost and financial risk in some circumstances where funding by other partners for collaborative activities has been reduced due to budgetary constraints.

Policy impact on sustainability

As noted above, tuition fee rates barely increased for inflation over the past decade meaning that universities' main income stream reduced in real terms.

In tandem with the reducing levels of tuition fee income, student maintenance funding has not kept pace with inflation. It is believed that this has contributed to a gradual undermining of students' motivation to enrol at university, despite the overwhelming evidence of a positive impact on career prospects resulting from a university education.

Research activities have been similarly subject to severe financial pressures. At best, research activity is funded at 80% of cost, meaning that universities need to provide an increasing level of subsidy for such work year on year.

The most recent high impact policy change has come in form of changes to VISA regulations by the UK Government. These changes have affected our ability to recruit from some international student recruitment markets, meaning a reduction in income and a less diverse university community.

It should also be noted that the Welsh Government's Seren Programme has continued to have a detrimental impact on our ability to attract some Welsh domiciled students. While I am fully aligned with the Welsh Government's aim to enable gifted students to apply to universities that meet their needs best, at the very least a perception has been allowed to develop that such talents are channelled towards institutions in England, despite the strengths of Welsh institutions in relevant disciplines.

Changes made and outlook

Aberystwyth University is currently in the process of delivering plans that will see significant spending reductions within the institution.

These plans include removing up to 200 staff posts as well as reductions to non-pay budgets as we ensure that the University's spending is within its income levels.

While spending reductions have had to be delivered over a short period of time in order to respond to the financial challenges of the sector, we have also instigated a Transformation Programme aimed at driving longer-term change that will result in better ways of working, and more efficient structures within the University.

All elements of this work are ongoing and have been supported by generally positive recruitment during 2024/25. We are confident of meeting our financial targets for the year, which form part of our plan to return to financial surplus over the coming years. However, it is important to note that all progress will remain dependent on external factors such as inflation and international student recruitment markets, as well as internal delivery of spending reductions and transformation projects.

Yours,



Professor Jon Timmis
Vice-Chancellor

Agenda Item 3.34



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25 April 2025

Dear Buffy,

The Royal College of Nursing Wales remains deeply concerned about Cardiff University's plans for nursing education, which involve teaching fewer undergraduates. I enclose a copy of our public response to the consultation which may be of interest to Committee members.

There are, as I know you are aware, significant difficulties in higher education in Wales at present and I very much welcome your decision to seek information from the Vice-Chancellors and Directors of all Welsh universities to better understand the challenges.

However, there are several reasons why nursing as a higher education subject is particularly vulnerable. **I therefore strongly urge you to open a one-day inquiry into nursing in higher education in Wales.**

I believe that the Children, Young People and Education Committee is best placed to do this. The topic of nursing in higher education has often been exclusively left to those in the health domain but I think it is vitally important to stimulate public policy discussion on nursing in higher education for the following reasons:

1) The Welsh Government needs to support nursing research.

Nursing research improves patient care. Both clinical and public policy nursing research need investment – to attract top nursing students, strengthen Wales's healthcare policies, and build a solid career framework for nursing lecturers. To do all this and make

Continued.....

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Mae'r RCN yn cynrychioli nrysys a nyrsio, gan hyrwyddo rhagoriaeth mewn arfer a llunio polisiau iechyd

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Wales the best place to study nursing, the Welsh government needs to work with all higher education institutions to develop a nursing education strategy.

2) The nurse educator workforce is being eroded just when patients need it to grow.

RCN Wales is very concerned about the impact of redundancy schemes on the workforce and the way that expertise has been eroded and shrinking at a time when we need to be growing education capacity and expertise to deliver the future nursing workforce.

A registered nurse who works in higher education is both an academic professional and a nursing professional. But the shape of the academic nursing workforce has changed in the last few years, with nurses today entering academia much earlier in their careers. To ensure continued high quality nursing education and research in Wales, the Welsh Government must work with higher education institutions to ensure these nursing staff are supported and funded to carry out nursing research and develop their careers as academics and as registered nurses. Higher education institutions need support to continue delivering high-quality nursing research as well as nursing education. Nursing departments are not a major income-generating activity for universities. Not only does the cost of organising clinical placements and length of the course add to the complexity of course administration, nurse lecturers also need to maintain their clinical practice. This means that without additional support, nursing departments can find it difficult to participate and publish research that is attractive to HEIs.

Here are just two positive examples of the difference nursing researchers and research make to Wales.

Dr Clare Bennett, a Reader in Health Improvement at Cardiff University, also co-directs the Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care. She leads a research, innovation and knowledge exchange programme which is making a difference to the lives of children and young people and to the organisation of health services. In 2024, her work was recognised in the RCN Wales Nurse of the Year awards, where she won the “Research, Innovation and Digitalisation in Nursing” category.

Sian Thomas, a consultant nurse for child health at Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, carried out research on the safety of blended diets as a way of controlling weight loss, vomiting, and diarrhoea in children who need a feeding tube – around 200 children in Wales each year. Her research led to nationwide change in practice and a change in British Dietetic Association policy, with endorsement from the Welsh Government and all health boards in Wales.

Continued.....

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3) The current education commissioning process fails to support HEIs to collaborate, innovate, and address challenges collectively.

At present, the way HEIW commissions and funds nursing education works as a commercial tendering process creating competition between HEIs and reducing opportunities for collaboration. [Cardiff University has made this case strongly](#), describing such collaboration as “crucial to preserving provision at a time when university finances are under pressure and student numbers are falling” and saying that the current situation “undermines the Welsh Government’s and Medr’s desire to have a more collaborative and differentiated sector”.

Given that Wales is a small country with a strong tradition of social partnership, and that the Welsh Government commissions nursing education, there is no reason why Wales should not have the best offer for nursing students in the United Kingdom. In that spirit, it would be more effective to support HEIs to work as a group, and work in partnership with health boards, to share insights and develop a coherent, strategic approach. A sufficiently adaptive and flexible commissioning process could permit institutions to develop their offer in line with their strengths—for example, rural health or learning disability nursing.

This differentiation would help safeguard plurality and diversity of nursing education provision in Wales, reducing the risk of losing undergraduate students, but also postgraduates and researchers, to institutions elsewhere.

4) Nursing students face a unique set of challenges.

The three years of full-time study required for a nursing degree typically consist of 42 working weeks a year – considerably more than a typical academic year. Nursing students spend half their degree on practical placements in NHS Wales and independent sector health and social care settings. A placement is a learning opportunity, not a job, and this is why students on placements are *supernumerary*. This means they are not counted as – and should not be relied on as – part of the workforce.

For students, the length and demanding nature of the degree leaves little room for part-time employment, which means that numerous students experience financial hardship whilst undertaking their education. A UK wide RCN survey found that 31% of nursing students had dependent children, 10% were single parents and 23% were caring for a sick, disabled or elderly relative. While some students can and do supplement their student funding with shifts on the NHS “bank”, nursing students remain heavily reliant on student funding.

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Mae'r RCN yn cynrychioli nrysys a nyrsio, gan hyrwyddo rhagoriaeth mewn arfer a llunio polisiau iechyd

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies

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Rydym yn buddsoddi mewn llesiant Arian

Developing scholarships to support people from disadvantaged backgrounds to study nursing, and using increased funding as an incentive to pursue careers in shortage areas such as mental health and learning disability nursing, would help the funding model become more responsive to current need.

A focused public inquiry on these nursing issues is both long overdue and essential to a complete picture of the crisis facing higher education in Wales. My view is that the CYPE committee is the right body to carry it out.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely



HELEN WHYLEY, RN, MA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RCN WALES

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Executive Director of RCN Wales
Helen Whyley

Mae'r Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol yn Goleg Brenhinol a sefydlwyd drwy Siarter Frenhinol ac Undeb Llafur Cofestr Arbennig a sefydlwyd a dan Ddeddf Undebau Llafur (Cydgrynhai) 1992.

The RCN is a Royal College set up by Royal Charter and a Special Register Trade Union established under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

Noddwr/Patron
Ei Fawrhydi'r Brenin Siarl III/HM King Charles III

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Cardiff University's proposal to discontinue nurse education

Consultation response

About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

The Royal College of Nursing is the world's largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing, representing over 500,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, health care support workers and nursing students, including over 30,500 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with National Boards in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in nursing practice and shapes health and social care policy.

RCN Wales is very alarmed by Cardiff University's proposal to discontinue nurse education. We were also disappointed in the way we learnt about the proposal via the media without warning. This proposal directly impacts nurse academics and student members alike and has far reaching implications for patients and the public. This proposal comes at a time when there are an estimated 2000 vacancies of registered nurses across Wales and shocking accounts of corridor care across services.

The city of Cardiff, and Cardiff University, have a long history of providing undergraduate and postgraduate nurse education which commenced in 1972 in what was then the Welsh National School of Medicine. The nursing courses provided at Cardiff University across undergraduate, taught postgraduate and postgraduate research attract students and staff from within Wales, the rest of the UK and across the world. Cardiff University has an excellent reputation for bringing together high-quality nurse education and research with impact ranked 1st in Wales, 5th in the UK, and 51st in the world for nursing. This leads to exceptional nursing care and practice across the capital and beyond, delivering a local workforce, developing existing nurses and generating knowledge and research.

Implications for Workforce

Applications and recruitment to undergraduate nursing programmes across the UK have fallen and Cardiff University is not unique in facing this challenge. RCN Wales recognises that the institution must operate in a research-intensive environment as a Russell Group

university ensuring high levels of research output, attracting the best students and competing globally. Yet Cardiff University has a civic duty to consider its role in developing and delivering the future nursing workforce both locally and nationally for Wales. The very idea of discontinuing nurse education is out of line with Cardiff University's own strategy,¹ launched in 2024, which is to "act as an anchor institution in our city-region, delivering cultural, social, economic and environmental benefit for Cardiff". The delivery of nurse education is not simply about numbers of undergraduate nursing students: having institutions with the resources, capacity and expertise to deliver nurse education in the right location(s) is crucial to this. Cardiff University stands out for its location, reputation, and research-intensive culture.

Over the last 2 years we have seen a steady increase in applications to study nursing in Wales, alongside record levels of commissioning, therefore it would seem that renegotiating the size and scale of Cardiff's provision with Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) is needed to deliver nurse education sustainably. Nursing as a subject brings in a significant amount of funding, whilst we recognise the need for universities to be able to plan their business sustainably, a decline in student recruitment is not a rationale for the discontinuation of the subject. As the professional body for nursing in Wales we expect to be involved in discussions exploring potential solutions to avoid job losses for nurse academics and maintain the subject. RCN Wales is concerned about the lack of detail of the equality impact assessment of these proposals. Given that nursing is a female dominated workforce we would have expected to have seen detailed information of the assessment and reassurance that the potential for discrimination against women had been fully considered.

Implications for Postgraduate Provision and Inter-professional Education

Nursing is for many a lifelong career and having access to high quality postgraduate provision is essential for retaining and developing a highly skilled nursing workforce to meet the ambitious strategic nursing workforce plan for Wales. Any loss of postgraduate provision is a matter of great concern at a time when Wales needs to be growing its advanced and consultant nurse workforce, in line with the Enhanced, Advanced and Consultant Framework for Wales. Nurse academics teach across multiprofessional provision and have been fundamental in the establishment of this model and its continuing success. Service development projects undertaken by students have clearly demonstrated the positive impact of the interprofessional postgraduate provision on care delivery. Service transformation initiatives have led to Alumni of Cardiff University winning awards such as the RCN Wales Nurse of Year, exhibiting the impact that this education has forged. Furthermore, nurse academics' contribution and passion for developing advanced level practice globally is evident, with senior representation on national forums and the development of policy in advanced practice in the UK. Any loss of this provision, which has advanced countless nursing careers and improved patient outcomes, would be significant not only for aspiring professionals but also for patients, their families and the wider community.

¹ <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/about/our-profile/strategy/our-future-together>

Furthermore, this decision does not reflect the importance of other healthcare students learning inter-professionally alongside nurses and the significant contribution of nurse academics across the healthcare professions and to advancing practice. Up until most recently, Cardiff University has worked to develop and enhance inter-professional education across its provision and the continuation of nursing as a subject is a crucial endeavour as all professions learn and work alongside nurses in practice. In addition, there has been a significant investment in simulation, both in terms of capital investment and academic resource; nurse academics have been fundamental in leading this innovation and development. Programmes for educating healthcare professionals do not exist in isolation from each other, not only do nurse academics teach across professions, but the facilities for teaching these courses are also shared. The number of students on nursing degree courses is typically far larger than those for other healthcare professions. Without the numbers of students provided by nursing education, the viability of maintaining the modern buildings that house the university's advanced teaching and simulation facilities will be called into question. This proposal could introduce new risks to the future of the education programmes for other healthcare professions at Cardiff University.

Implications for the RCN Wales Research Chair and Nursing Research

External reviews of the quality of the research which has been undertaken in the School of Healthcare Science shows that it is recognised for its quality, relevance and real world impact. Cardiff has developed a global reputation in relation to this and members of staff are involved in editorial boards of some of the highest impact journals, as well as being involved in international research projects. To this end nurse academics have made a significant contribution not only to nursing research but also to interdisciplinary research, attracting significant amounts of external funding from competitive organisations such as National Institute of Health and Care Research; Health and Care Research Wales. This funding supports PGR students and contributes to an ecosystem that exists between teaching, research, and knowledge generation which in turn benefits patients and the public in Wales. In addition, The Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care, which enables the utilisation of interdisciplinary research in clinical practice has been developed, led and is currently directed by nurse academics.

It is for this reason that the RCN Wales Research Chair has been hosted by Cardiff university for so many years as the RCN recognised the environment and culture that Cardiff offers for this Professorship to impact on health research. Funds for the RCN Research Chair were raised by RCN members and the citizens of Wales in 1988. The funds were entrusted to be invested by Cardiff University, and we have worked in synergy with them ever since. Recent impact of the RCN Chair has included helping to secure funded Masters Fellowships in Nursing for the next 5 years (one national one international) from the Burdett Charity for Nursing. Other examples include giving oral evidence to the Senedd Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016.

Implications for the Nursing Profession

The proposal to discontinue nursing as a subject within what has been a thriving School of Healthcare Sciences, devalues nursing at a time when workforce development is most

crucial. There is a robust evidence base that graduate nurses provide high quality care, reduce patient mortality and improve patient outcomes. To deliver the future nursing workforce, we need a range of education providers across Wales to meet the needs of our diverse and aging population. A Russell Group University delivering nurse education in Wales raises the profile and importance of the profession. This enables the subject to be taught in an environment that is research intensive, which develops the evidence base and continues to progress the profession beyond traditions. Therefore, it is especially important that historical, reputable and esteemed institutions choose to deliver nursing, and we would urge Cardiff University to take the actions below:

- Explore the alternative proposals put forward by our members and work with us as their professional body to implement these.
- Mitigate risks to workforce in its widest sense and protect jobs at all costs by ensuring there are no compulsory redundancies.
- Safeguard future nurse-led research and knowledge generation.
- Proactively engage with Welsh Government in relation to your civic responsibility and requirement to work in social partnership.
- Communicate transparently with HEIW to enable nurse education to continue at Cardiff University.
- Thoroughly explore the risks to interprofessional education and research.

RCN Wales Nurse of the Year Alumni with affiliation to Cardiff University:

Name / Year / Category	Specialism and Winning Area	Contribution and Connection to Cardiff University
Tim Nicholls, Specialist Nurse of the Year Award, 2024, winner	Tim is a clinical specialist nurse in dementia care, his work enhances patient and their families' experiences of dementia care in community and inpatient settings.	Tim studied Mental Health Nursing at Cardiff University 2004 – 2007, upon registration Tim went to work in Mental Health Services for Older people for Cardiff and Vale. The education Tim received has inspired his career and culminated with him recently winning the Specialist Nurse of the year award at the most recent RCN awards.
Dr Clare Bennett – Research, Digitalisation and Innovation Award 2024, winner	Clare is a Reader in Health Improvement, and leads a programme of research, innovation and knowledge exchange which is making a difference to the lives of children and young people and to the organisation of health services across Wales and beyond.	Clare completed her PhD at Cardiff University's in 2016 and returned as an academic in 2018. Clare has made a significant contribution to service delivery within Wales through her work in the field of evidence implementation, multidisciplinary research and teaching across all the health professions (undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD). Clare also co-directs the Wales Centre for Evidence-Based Care at Cardiff University, which supports a variety of multidisciplinary teams in determining the best approaches to patient care and service delivery.
Tara Rees, 2023, Overall, Winner	As Lead Hepatology Clinical Nurse Specialist at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, Tara is a clinical expert in the field. She has worked at an advanced level to advocate for a vulnerable patient cohort and has dedicated her career to building new	Tara is a Cardiff Alumni and currently works as a Lead Hepatology Clinical Nurse Specialist for Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. She has led on national accreditation for her hepatology service and been lead nurse for the All-Wales Liver Disease Delivery plan.

	services. Tara demonstrated her passion for improving patient experience by creating new services for those with specialist needs.	
Nelson Selvaraj Nurse Education Category 2023, winner	Nelson is a lecturer (Adult Nursing) at the School of Healthcare Sciences and his background is critical care. He leads drug calculation numeracy for nursing which is integral to ensuring that students meet programme requirements for drug calculation competencies. Nelson was instrumental in enhancing the student experience when supporting students with numeracy assessment improving student success. During the COVID pandemic, he collaborated with other experienced critical care lecturers and delivered two-full days of teaching and simulation to support the covid response training more than 200 ward-based staff nurses and other allied healthcare professionals.	Nelson was awarded Masters in Critical Care by Cardiff University's School of Medicine in 2015 and started his career as an academic. Since then, he has been leading and delivering various clinical skills / simulation-based sessions across the nursing programme and working collaboratively across schools to support inter-professional education (IPE). Nelson successfully secured funding from Research Capacity Building Collaboration (RCBC), Wales in 2023 to undertake a scoping review exploring the challenges experienced by Intensive Care Unit nurses during the organ donation process and presented his findings at local and national conferences. He is a trustee of the Believe Organ Donor Support charity, Wales.
Diana De, Nurse Education Award 2023, runner up	Diana is currently a Reader in Adult Nursing at Cardiff University. Diana is thoroughly committed to two key educational areas-cultural awareness in educational programmes and delivering the Return to Practice (RTP) programme.	Diana is currently a Reader in Adult Nursing at Cardiff University. During her time as a Senior Lecturer at the university, Diana developed and led a new Global Health module on the Bachelor of Nursing programme, promoting equality and diversity in health care settings on a local, national and international level. She works hard to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion are championed in Cardiff University's School of Healthcare Sciences and conveyed to students through innovative and engaging sessions.
Louise Hymers – Community Nursing Award 2023, winner	Louise is a Macmillan Lead Nurse for Cancer and Palliative Care, who is passionate about improving end-of-life care.	Louise achieved her MSc in Palliative Care in 2018 at Cardiff University and is currently practicing as a Macmillan Lead Nurse for Cancer and Palliative Care at Powys Teaching Health Board, Louise is also undertaking a part time secondment within the NHS Executive as Lead Nurse Cancer Nursing Workforce within the National Strategic Clinical Network for Cancer.
Professor Paul Gill, Research Award 2023, winner	Paul was a Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing with a clinical background in critical care nursing. Paul is a dedicated and committed researcher with a career-long goal to improve patient outcomes. An experienced research mentor and supervisor, Paul has nurtured researchers at all stages and facilitated those pursuing a research career pathway.	Paul was a Senior Lecturer (Adult Nursing) and completed his PhD at Cardiff University in 2007. During his time at Cardiff University, Paul taught undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students, and was joint Operational Group Lead for Research Capacity Building Collaboration Wales (RCBC), an all-Wales collaboration to increase the capacity and capability of research in nursing, midwifery and allied health professional groups.
Professor Judith Carrier, Supporting Improvement Through Research	Professor Judith Carrier has a passion for research and evidence synthesis, and throughout her career she has consistently gone above and beyond her role to positively impact nursing knowledge and enhance patient care.	Judith's career has spanned critical care and practice nursing. In 2001, she moved into academia and developed a programme for Practice Nurses in Gwent, leading BSc Community programmes in Cardiff and Oman, she became the Professional Head Primary

Award 2023, runner up	Judith has shared her knowledge of evidence synthesis and implementation by teaching hundreds of students and mentoring staff. She has also passed on her understanding of primary research through PhD supervision which has led to further service improvement.	Care/ Community Nursing and Director of Postgraduate Provision at Cardiff University. Judith was Director of the Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care (WCEBC) from 2010-2021, and the impact of its work in that period has been wide-ranging, including feeding into Welsh Government policy. She is currently Professor of Nursing, and Co-Deputy Director Wales Centre for Evidence Based Care at Cardiff University
Dr Ricky Hellyar Innovation and Digitalisation in Nursing Award 2021, winner	Ricky a Cardiff University lecturer in Adult Nursing, created the podcast series 'Behind the Health Statistic', which has grown an international following. Initially developed as an educational tool for pre-registration nurses, the podcasts evolved to become an alternative source of learning to books and other digital media.	Ricky is an Alumnus of Cardiff University and current staff member, having completed his MSc in Critical Care and his PhD (from 2012 – 2015) at the University. Ricky is currently a Senior Lecturer in Adult Nursing at Cardiff University. He has a breadth of experience in undergraduate nursing module development and has made significant contributions to Cardiff Nursing Futures and curriculum development. He is committed to positively contributing towards developing nurse education and its success at Cardiff University.
Amanda Holland and Lorraine Joomun, Nurse Education Award (joint nomination) 2021, runner up	At the time of the awards, Amanda was the SCPHN Programme Manager and Lecturer in Primary Care and Public Health at Cardiff University. Amanda has a background in health visiting and community nursing. She is passionate about raising the profile of health visiting and influencing policy to improve outcomes for babies, children and families.	Amanda is a Cardiff University Alumnus, having completed her nursing degree (2005-2008) and going on to complete post-graduate studies at the university, in addition to being a former staff member – Amanda was a Lecturer/ senior lecturer at Cardiff University, in primary care/public health nursing from 2015 to 2023, specialising in Specialist Community Public Health Nursing (SCPHN) Health Visiting. SCPHN programme manager. Senior Fellow Advanced HE. During 2020-2021, using a creative approach, they (Amanda and joint nominee Lorraine Joomun) adapted the SCPHN programme for online learning with a combination of tools and teaching resources.
Dr Victoria Shepherd, Supporting Improvement Through Research Award 2019, runner up	A NIHR Doctoral Research Fellow, Victoria has established a programme of research with practical application, with groups whose voices previously had not been heard. This includes people living with dementia, older people in care home settings and others who lack mental capacity.	Victoria is a Principal Research Fellow and registered nurse based in the Centre for Trials Research at Cardiff University. Her special interest in improving the inclusion of under-served populations with a particular focus on populations and settings where informed consent can be challenging. Victoria leads a programme of methodological research exploring the ethical, legal and practical issues around research involving adults who lack capacity consent and the development of complex interventions to address the barriers to inclusion.
Dr Aled Jones Research Award 2018, winner	With a background in mental health and adult nursing, as a Reader in Patient Safety and Healthcare Quality at Cardiff University, Aled led an innovative, policy-relevant, research programme which was improving nursing practice and health care in Wales, the UK and internationally.	During his time at Cardiff University Aled engaged in research-led teaching and led the Optimising Service Delivery and Organisation Research Theme. This brought together researchers at different career stages who conduct studies improving health care services and practice

Michelle Moseley, Safeguarding Award 2018, winner	Michelle's expertise sits within post-graduate education, health visiting and safeguarding. Michelle developed health board policy based on the recommendations from her MSc in Advanced Nursing Practice (Safeguarding Children and Young People), around health visitors recording of domestic abuse incidents.	Michelle is a Cardiff Alumnus, having completed most of her post-registration education at Cardiff in various iterations of the Nursing and Midwifery Schools. Michelle worked at the university as a lecturer from 2013–2020, leading the SCPHN programme. Michelle has recently been awarded her PhD, completed at Cardiff University, exploring the supportive nature of safeguarding supervision for health visitors taking an ethnographic stance. This has supported the development of the most recent All Wales safeguarding supervision guidance.
Dr Nicola Evans, Research Award 2017, winner	Nicola is recognised internationally as a research leader, teacher and practitioner in children and young people's mental health. Her excellence in this field is evidenced by her international publications, competitively secured funding and her growing national and international collaborations.	Nicola is a longstanding member of staff, and currently Director of Research at Cardiff University, where she is also a Reader in Mental Health Nursing. Nicola completed her Doctorate at Cardiff University in 2014. She currently teaches both undergraduate and postgraduate students at Cardiff University and leads a professional doctorate module.
Dr Sally Anstey, Nurse Education Award 2016, runner up	Sally is a Reader in Adult Nursing. Sally has dedicated her academic career to the pursuit of educational and research excellence covering a diverse range of nursing themes and matters.	Sally is currently a Reader in Adult Nursing, and Research Theme Lead: Optimising wellbeing and management in health and disease, working at Cardiff University since 2006. She is a Registered Adult Nurse and teaches across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes specifically cancer, genetics, palliative and end of life care, research and ethics.
Dr Ben Hannigan, Research Award 2015, winner	Ben, currently a Professor of Mental Health Nursing, has successfully developed a sustained body of research into mental health nursing, with a strong emphasis on including the views of service users from the outset. He has been involved in generating over one million pounds of competitive research funding. Ben has also advanced the profile of mental health nursing as an evidence-based discipline through his contribution to the group, Mental Health Academics UK.	Ben is a longstanding member of staff in, and a PhD alumnus of, Cardiff University. Ben completed his doctorate in 2006 which examined the organisation of community mental health care and the division of work. Since then, Ben has gone on to become a Professor of Mental Health Nursing in the School of Healthcare Sciences, and to lead and contribute to a series of externally funded research projects in mental health systems and services. Ben combines researching mental health systems and services with teaching across all academic levels, and over the years has maintained a steady flow of publications.
Lisa Cordory, Innovation Award 2015, winner	Lisa is a specialist Nurse in emotional wellbeing and Children's Rights lead for the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. Lisa has been responsible for the set up and continuation of the award-winning Youth Health Board which embeds a Children's Rights approach and youth voice across Wales.	As registered nurse and midwife Lisa went on to achieve a Professional Doctorate in Advanced Healthcare from 2016 to 2022 at Cardiff University, contributing to nurse education as an expert guest lecturer.
Ruth Cann 2013, Overall winner	The work-based project Ruth carried out as part of her MSc dissertation Helped Ruth to stand out and go on to win RCN Nurse of the Year in 2013.	Ruth completed her MSc in Advanced Practice on chronic conditions in 2014 at Cardiff University. All the support and opportunities provided by Cardiff University helped Ruth to achieve her goal of becoming a Consultant Nurse for Older Vulnerable Adults caring for Older People in the Cardiff and Vale region.

Agenda Item 3.35

Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion Gwledig

Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee

Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages

Baroness Jean Coussins

Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages

1 May 2025

Dear Tonia and Jean,

Proposed closures in languages and cultures at Cardiff University

Thank you for your letter of 3 April regarding the proposed closure of degrees in languages and cultures at Cardiff University.

While we note your concerns it is not the responsibility of Senedd Committees to carry out economic impact assessments.

You may be aware that the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee and the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations (CCWLSIR) Committee are carrying out inquiries which relate to the issues you have raised. The CYPE Committee is carrying out a short inquiry into issues facing the Higher Education Sector, and is due to receive evidence from Cardiff University in June.

We are currently keeping a watching brief on the situation in Welsh Higher Education and intend to follow the work of these Committees, and will pursue issues as necessary regarding any concerns raised around the potential economic impact of the proposed closures.

I have copied this letter to Buffy Williams MS and Delyth Jewel MS in their roles as Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, and the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee respectively.

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Kind regards,

Andrew RT Davies

Andrew RT Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English

CC:

Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee



Agenda Item 3.36

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl
Ifanc ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education
Committee**

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Peter Fox MS,
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

07 May 2025

Issues facing the higher education sector

Dear Peter,

Congratulations on your recent election to Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

We are currently looking at the issues facing the higher education sector in Wales. While this work started because of the proposals for changes at Cardiff University, it has broadened out to look more widely at the issues facing the sector as a whole.

We are aware of your particular interest in the issues surrounding the initial proposal to close the nursing department. I note that over the recess period, there have been reports that Cardiff University are now proposing to continue to offer some nursing courses.

The President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wendy Larner, will be coming to Committee on Thursday 12 June. Due to your likely interest in this particular issue, would like to invite one or two members of the Committee to attend the session under Standing Order 17.49.

Please can you let the Clerk know no later than 2 June if any of your Members wish to take up this offer along with the names of those Members.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Agenda Item 3.37

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl
Ifanc ac Addysg**

**Children, Young
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Delyth Jewell MS,
Chair, Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and
International Relations Committee

08 May 2025

Issues facing the higher education sector

Dear Delyth,

We are currently looking at the issues facing the higher education sector in Wales. While this work started because of the proposals for changes at Cardiff University, it has broadened out to look more widely at the issues facing the sector as a whole.

We are aware of your particular interest in the issues surrounding the proposal to cease the subjects and programmes in modern languages and translation

The President and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wendy Larnar, will be coming to Committee on Thursday 12 June. Due to your likely interest in this particular issue, would like to invite one members of the Committee to attend the session under Standing Order 17.49.

Please can you let the Clerk know no later than 2 June if any of your Members wish to take up this offer along with the names of those Members. If none of your Members are able to attend but there are specific issues you want us to raise with the President and Vice-Chancellor, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS



**Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament**

Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Issues facing the Higher Education Sector

Evidence by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

This document provides the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee with an overview of the state of Welsh-medium provision in the higher education (HE) sector in light of current issues facing the sector.

Summary

- Almost all Welsh universities are making cuts to staff, provision and professional services. Although universities do give consideration to the Welsh language in their plans, cuts have already had negative effects on Welsh language provision and services.
- Further cuts are likely to have further negative effects on the Welsh language.
- Less Welsh-medium provision in universities will be detrimental to Cymraeg 2050 goals because of:
 - Fewer opportunities for HE students to use, maintain and develop their Welsh. This could lead to loss of skills and confidence, and fewer young people willing to use their Welsh.
 - Fewer graduates entering the workforce able to work through the medium of Welsh, including in key areas such as education, health and care.
- Reduced Welsh-medium provision in universities also runs counter to the objectives of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill, which puts the target of one million speakers on a statutory basis. Achieving the Bill's objectives requires training an education workforce with advanced skills in Welsh. There must be enough graduates who have those skills.
- After the Bill is implemented, in time all learners should leave statutory education as independent Welsh speakers. Welsh language provision in HE

will need to be expanded, not reduced, to allow those learners to continue to maintain and develop their Welsh.

- Broader trends and policy decisions impact the potential pool of students and the sustainability of Welsh and bilingual provision. For example, 47% of Welsh HE students attend universities outside Wales, and this increases to 65% of students who have been part of the Seren Academy.

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Evidence base

The evidence in this document is based on:

- Universities' responses to formal requests for information. In March 2025, the Coleg wrote to all Welsh universities requesting information about their plans to safeguard Welsh-medium provision in the face of the current uncertainty. To date, seven have provided a written response.
- Meetings the Coleg has held with staff (at all levels) and students.

Commitment to the Welsh language

All universities that have responded to the Coleg's request for information emphasise that they remain committed to their strategic plans for the Welsh language.

Redundancy schemes

Almost all universities that have responded to the Coleg's request for information have or are in the process of running voluntary redundancy schemes. They note that they are giving consideration to the Welsh language and seek to avoid adverse impacts on Welsh-medium academic provision and professional services.

However, the Coleg has seen that redundancy schemes can unintentionally lead to a reduction in Welsh-medium learning opportunities and in the quality the student

experience. There is a risk of losing individuals who make an important contribution to Welsh-medium provision and Welsh-medium professional services.

Examples of voluntary redundancies putting pressure on Welsh-medium provision at four different universities

- Paramedic Science – 36 students are studying 40cr+ through the medium of Welsh in 2024/25 but the main Welsh-medium lecturer is leaving under a voluntary redundancy scheme.
- Music – three members of staff who between them provided 80cr through the medium of Welsh have left under a voluntary redundancy scheme.
- Quantity Surveying – the Welsh-medium provision has ceased following the departure of a member of staff under a voluntary redundancy scheme.
- Business – 1.5 members of staff have left one university since summer 2024, putting pressure on Welsh-medium provision.

Examples of pressure on Welsh-medium support services

- The Welsh Development Manager (Health) of one university has taken voluntary redundancy. This affects the way Welsh-medium provision is designed and developed across several courses in a priority area.
- In another university, certain responsibilities for central services have been placed on the Welsh-language team, e.g. answering switchboard calls for the whole university.
- Student representatives report that complaints from students about the provision and services in Welsh have increased. In one case, for example, there was no funding to translate an English multiple-choice exam paper so students taking the assessment in Welsh had to write an extended essay in the exam rather than sit the multiple-choice paper.

Provision

Several universities are currently considering and consulting on proposals to reorganise provision, but only Cardiff University has published a list of departments and courses being considered for winding down as part of their formal proposals. Cardiff University's original proposals included Nursing, where there is Welsh-medium provision and where the Coleg has been investing for several years. The announcement that Nursing will not be closing is therefore welcome, although it will be necessary to ensure that students are still able to study through the medium of Welsh and are supported and encouraged to do so.

As a result of Cardiff University's announcement, there are no known proposals to close departments or eliminate courses that would directly lead to a reduction in Welsh-medium provision. Nevertheless, several consultations and schemes are underway across the sector and the Coleg keeps in close contact with universities about them. Universities in general report that they consider alternative ways of delivering Welsh-medium provision rather than abolishing it.

It is extremely important that universities reviewing their provision in the face of the current crisis do not make decisions that have national implications for Welsh-medium provision. Only one or two universities offer certain subjects through the medium of Welsh. If they were to end that provision without consultation, based solely on their own interests, it could have a far-reaching impact on the availability of the subject throughout Wales. The Coleg will be working closely with Medr on an exercise to map 'fragile' provision, but universities should be encouraged not to make any decisions to end provision until the mapping work has been completed and an element of national planning can be introduced.

Pressure on subjects with smaller numbers

- Several subjects such as Music and MFL are available through the medium of Welsh in one university only. Should the university abolish the provision, it would not be possible to study them at all through the medium of Welsh.

- Religious Studies is another example of a subject under pressure. This has been raised by [Cytûn](#).

Opportunities to develop provision

- Some universities are developing centres of excellence and Welsh language hubs to support students and to provide key services. This includes the development of Welsh-medium academic provision in cross-disciplinary areas.
- Some universities are identifying opportunities to increase and develop Welsh-medium provision, including the development of Welsh-medium pathways for all students.
- Several universities have referred to plans to develop the Welsh language skills of their current staff with the aim of increasing the workforce capable of providing education and services through the medium of Welsh.

Curriculum review

Some universities are also undertaking curriculum reviews and are considering plans to 'streamline' modules and possibly remove modules with small numbers of students or introduce a minimum numbers threshold.

Although universities must implement a sustainable business plan and to some extent respond to market demand, they should not treat Welsh-medium provision in the same way as English-medium provision, as the number of students on individual Welsh-medium modules will inevitably be smaller. This is particularly true in some specialist subjects where the numbers of students studying the subject to A Level through the medium of Welsh are also small.

Examples of concerns arising due to curriculum review

- Several lecturers and universities have noted that a reduction in overall teaching capacity is putting pressure on Welsh-medium lecturers to spend less time teaching through the medium of Welsh.
- A move away from 10cr modules and towards larger modules creates challenges in terms of capacity to deliver 100% Welsh modules.
- A move away from joint honours provision is causing challenges in some universities. This affects subjects such as Welsh, which has traditionally been combined with other subjects.

Examples of opportunities that may arise from curriculum review

- One university is consulting on a 'Block and Flexible' delivery model, which could facilitate the introduction of Welsh-medium provision to more subjects.
- Another university has developed a model of identifying 40 credits of generic provision at levels 4, 5 and 6.

Wider policy influences

Wider policies also affect the ability of universities to offer Welsh-medium provision.

Many students choose to attend universities outside Wales, reducing the potential pool of students who could study part of their HE course through the medium of Welsh. More graduates with Welsh language skills are needed to achieve Cymraeg 2050 goals, but over half of those who leave Wales to study at university do not return during their most economically productive years.

In 2023/24, around 23,000 learners were involved in the Seren Academy programme, with 24% coming from Welsh and bilingual schools. Seren encourages learners to apply to universities primarily outside of Wales, with 65% of Seren learners going on to study outside Wales in 2023, compared to 47% for Wales as a whole.

The Coleg is of the view that the Seren Academy should ensure that all centres provide specific information and support about opportunities to study in Welsh or bilingually, emphasising the importance of the language in the workplace. There is also a need to ensure that young people do not get the indirect message that HE in Wales – and therefore Welsh-medium HE – is of a lower standard.

For further information please contact polisi@colegcymraeg.ac.uk.

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15 May 2025

Children, Young People and Education Committee: Response to request for information

Dear Buffy

Many thanks for your letter, and for the invitation to give evidence to the Committee. I welcome the spotlight on the financial challenges being experienced across the HE sector, and look forward to the session on 3rd July.

With regards to the information requested ahead of this session, I have set out some key headlines for Wrexham University under the categories set out in your letter:

1. An overview of your assessment of the financial challenges facing Wrexham University, with reference to key data that underpins this assessment (e.g. current and projected student numbers, take-up rates, levels of reserves, etc) for both the coming financial year and the longer-term picture;
 - Wrexham faces similar challenges as the rest of the sector with pay awards, NI increases and increases in pension contributions (particularly TPS at more than 28%, expected to increase to 35% in April 2027), creating the need to generate more income from tuition fee sources. This presents a fundamental challenge to the University.
 - The capping of Home Undergraduate fees has impacted negatively as the fee has remained flat whilst the costs associated with delivering a 21st century student experience has increased. Wrexham University has diversified its income streams in response.
 - The recent increase in tuition fees was welcome. However, this is more than offset by the increases in cost base associated with NI increases. Work on the five year forecast for the University indicates significant increases in the cost base through pay, NI, pensions and estates costs. The University will have to deliver growth and efficiencies to ensure financial sustainability.



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wrexam.ac.uk | wrexham.ac.uk

Elusen Gofrestredig Rhif. **1142048**
Registered Charity No. **1142048**

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg neu'r Saesneg.
Rhowch wybod inni os hoffech chi dderbyn gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg.
Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.
Please let us know if you wish to receive correspondence in Welsh.
Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay.

- The University has experienced a drop in Home Undergraduate numbers which has impacted financially. Low participation rates in HE in Wales and an ageing population in North Wales further compound this. This has been offset through the HEIW contract and diversification. The University is also working in partnership to address the low participation issue.
 - International tuition fee income has reduced in 2024/25. Although the June 2025 intake numbers appear to be recovering, they are still lagging behind the level achieved in June 2023. The impact of this has meant a shortfall in the projected income this year; we are currently forecasting a break-even position against a predicted surplus of £1.9m. Student recruitment in the current academic year will also impact on next year's budget, meaning the University will be predicting a deficit next year. The size of this is still being quantified.
 - Full-time Home Undergraduate students (excluding our Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW) programmes) have been steadily decreasing over the last 5 years. The University leadership team is reviewing the portfolio, aligning it with the needs of industry and local demands to address this.
 - Wrexham's cash position remains positive following the sale of assets that were not being utilised for teaching or research. This cash has been allocated to approved capital projects over the next 2-3 years. Potential future deficits will impact Wrexham's ability to fully execute those plans.
 - During the current budget-setting process the Executive Team are focused on:
 - Delivering efficiencies
 - Diversifying income streams
 - Reviewing the portfolio bringing forward a new refreshed portfolio aligned to skills requirements
 - Reviewing the estate needs and ensuring efficient use of the estate
2. Details of any specific policies at Welsh- or UK-government level that have significantly impacted on Wrexham University's ability to operate sustainably;
- As noted above, government legislation on immigration, National Insurance changes and tuition fee capping all contribute to the sector challenges (noting that the recent increase to the fee cap is to be welcomed).



- Wrexham City has a severe shortage of private rental housing available for students. While we do not point to specific policy, it is important to note that a lack of affordable housing limits our ability to recruit students from across Wales/the UK. This situation also impacts on our wider student experience; students are having to reside further away from campus, facing additional cost and time burdens.
3. The changes that have already been made in recent years by you or your predecessors to mitigate the impact of the financial challenges facing Wrexham University.
- Wrexham University has undertaken a number of restructures over recent years (most significantly in 2018) which has meant that many of the sector challenges have been successfully weathered due to a very lean operating model. However, there is need to ensure processes are more efficient and where possible digitised to enable this lean model to operate moving forward.
 - Previous sale of assets has contributed greatly to a positive University cash position, allowing for excess funds to be invested to earn interest to support the operating position. However, there are ongoing commitments required around condition work on the University estate which will place increasing demands on the Universities finances
 - Winning the HEIW contract to provide commissioned places in nursing and allied health has ensured that student numbers remain buoyant, although significant investment has been required for this programme, in both staffing and capital resources.

I trust this information is of use but should you have any further questions or require or more information prior to the 3rd July, please reach out to my office at vc@wrexham.ac.uk

Yours sincerely



Professor Joe Yates
Vice Chancellor and CEO



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9 May 2025

Dear members of the Senedd Children, Young People and Education Committee,

ColegauCymru – further evidence on 14-16

Thank you for requesting further information to assist with the inquiry into Routes into Post-16 Education and Training in relation to 14-16, and the Junior Apprenticeship programme. We have provided answers to the questions posed by the Committee below, but if you need anything further, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

1. Approximately what proportion of children in the participating schools are currently eligible for the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme? Who assesses eligibility and how? Are there significant numbers of children who are at risk of disengaging from education or training who are not currently able to access this provision due to capacity/funding limitations (and if so, approximately how many)?

Introduction

Junior apprenticeships provide a vocational education and training opportunity for learners aged between 14-16 particularly those who are at risk of Not being in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) or learners that do not adjust well to the typical academic school system.

The programme offers a two-year programme of work-related education with work experience built in, alongside a Level 2 course that is equivalent to four or five GCSEs, in a range of different vocational pathways. Each learner also studies GCSEs in mathematics and English alongside their chosen area.

There are different delivery models for 14-16 provision in FE colleges, and 5 out of the 12 FE Colleges in Wales have previously accessed 'junior apprenticeship' funding and provided a variety of options for courses including:

- Public services
- Landscaping
- Fabrication and Welding
- Automotive Engineering
- Construction
- Hair and Beauty
- Hospitality and Catering
- Media

Eligibility

It is difficult to quantify how many children in the participating schools are currently eligible for the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme as Cardiff and the Vale College are not privy to this information. However, any year 10 or year 11 child who is at risk of becoming NEET would potentially be eligible. Eligibility is assessed via a panel consisting of the local authority, the school and the college.

Where active junior apprenticeship pathways are available, access to junior apprenticeship programmes within colleges are mostly targeted to specific pupils or groups of pupils rather than these programmes being available on an open access basis to all Year 10 and 11 pupils.

A variety of referral and selection methods are used by colleges, schools and local authorities in local areas offering junior apprenticeship programmes in order to identify potential learners and allocate available places. Targeted approaches tend to prioritise those who were struggling to engage with mainstream school provision and were particularly at risk of becoming NEET. but also show an interest in vocational learning.

The option of a junior apprenticeship programme, where these are available, is often considered as an alternative option to other education otherwise than at school (EOTAS) options including pupil referral units (PRUs).

The larger junior apprenticeship college providers tend to receive substantially more applications each year than they can accommodate. For example, in 2024 Cardiff and Vale College had 175 Junior Apprenticeship applicants but could only accommodate 90, and this appears to be an emerging pattern year-on-year.

A 2024 Estyn Review of the Junior Apprenticeship Programme¹ found that recruitment and selection methods were particularly systematic and robust where such programmes were oversubscribed. The most robust processes involved provision of extensive information on applicants and formal panel decision making and approval methods.

Transition arrangements are particularly important and beneficial to ensuring an appropriate match between applicants and the nature of the programme. Where these work well, there is close contact, open information sharing and regular dialogue between school and college staff leading up to learners commencing the junior apprenticeship programme and throughout the initial stages of the programme.

¹ [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

Participation in the junior apprenticeship programme based wholly or primarily in a FE college involved considerable change for learners and parents, both in terms of travelling to the college and the nature of the learning programme itself. For example, the time and distances involved to get to the college where the programme is delivered were often considerably greater than that required to travel to their local school.

Learners must also be able to adapt to college life including interaction with a much wider age range of learners in and around the wider learning environment, or becoming more independent in making their way to and from college where this requires use of public transport. Colegau Cymru is proactively engaging with the Welsh Government on Learner Travel, including participating in the Learner Travel Summit in May 2025.

These factors are important considerations for all parties involved in discussions and decision-making about individual learners' potential participation in a junior apprenticeship programme. In particular, this highlights the importance of identifying those learners who are most likely to have, or be able to develop, the necessary resilience and commitment to engage, sustain and benefit from such provision.

College, school and local authority representatives do recognise the logistics of attending college full-time and the nature of the programmes do not always suit everyone and that having their parent school act as a safety net is particularly important. The Estyn Report into Junior Apprenticeships found that in the most effective cases, providers reassure learners and parents or carers that the move from school to college is not intended as a 'one-way street' and that a place at school would still be available should this be needed.

The Estyn report also found that all Junior Apprenticeship providers recognised the importance of providing any additional support that was needed by individual learners. Many providers made sure that individual support needs were discussed and addressed as part of the referral and selection processes. However, individual development plans were not always shared or transferred across from school to the college and as a result this hindered or prevented continuity of support for the individual needs of the learners involved.²

2. Based on the numbers of pupils currently participating in the Cardiff and Vale College Junior Apprenticeship programme, what would be the approximate cost per annum of scaling up:

² [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

a. the Junior Apprenticeships provision that is currently offered at Cardiff and Vale College to all colleges across Wales? On whom would these costs fall?

An independent study has found that the Junior Apprenticeship Programme at Cardiff and the Vale College will save the economy £570,000 per person in preventative spend over the course of a 40-year working life and 60-year adult life, in addition to providing numerous additional benefits to learners.³

For Cardiff and Vale College the cost (including Welsh Government funding) equates to between £10,500 to £12,500k (this includes all delivery, transport and provision of FSM).

This represents a saving of between £4,633 to £6,633 for each learner enrolled in comparison to the cost of comparable EOTAS provision. Extrapolating to a cohort of 100 learners the annual saving is substantial, with the taxpayer benefiting between £463,000 to £663,000 for every 100 learners. This saving in the context of impact and added value, is important.

The main challenge with funding and finance, primarily relates to the fragmented funding model, with this coming from a mix of local authority / school budgets and a top up from Medr. As local authorities and schools face continued financial challenge, pressure continues with regards to any funding which leaves the school system to support alternative delivery. Whilst this approach protects school budgets, it reduces the scope to increase Junior Apprenticeship delivery, and for the forthcoming year, maintaining existing numbers is a challenge too. This landscape may vary between different local authorities, but it provides a perspective, and if we are to do the best thing for the learner then we need to make it easier for funding to flow/follow the learner in a way which best suits their needs. The Junior Apprenticeship programme is one solution, as part of a broader portfolio of options available to young people and for some it represents the best option. We need to find a way to support this delivery model for those which fall into this category. Bureaucracy around budgets should not be the main constraint to maximising the life chances of our young people.

b. an alternative 14-16 provision comprising a mixture of in-school and in-college learning (for example, provision whereby pupils spend 2 days per week in college, and the rest of the week in school)? On whom would these costs fall?

Coleg Sir Gâr and Coleg Ceredigion provides an alternative method in providing vocational skills courses to 14–16-year-olds. They have approximately 900 learners

³ August 2023 by Dr Steve Garner - Reducing inequalities in educational outcomes at CAVC.

from schools across Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion who study with them for between 2 and 4 hours a week. The delivery model is agreed by the college and the school. For example, some schools send their pupils to the college (they are bused into the College and back to attend class), or college staff go into schools to deliver the vocational qualification - in Llanelli there is a vocational centre on one of the school sites (the college services the construction centre). They also have a Youth Access provision. This is where some pupils from across a range of schools join a full vocational programme for 2 or 3 days a week. The other days they are in school picking up the statutory requirements of pre-16 education. Coleg Cambria is also delivering a similar model.

Coleg Cambria has 1004 14-16 year olds studying 30+ programmes/qualifications at the college each year.

This is across three different local authority areas and the majority attend for between 2-4 hours a week.

The largest scale programmes are in Wrexham where the local authority manages the process with the college, and it is the local authority who offer the places and arranges for learners to be bused to and from school to attend.

For the above programmes, Coleg Cambria charges £87 per hour to cover the costs of the lecturer in the class, they do not charge per learner, and have on average 12-15 learners in a group. This does not make any money for the college but they run it as a loss as they believe it is important to give young people an experience of college and a wider range of educational opportunities to support and motivate. Coleg Cambria is in the process of reviewing, and will likely have to increase, the £87 per hour charge due to the extra pressures facing the FE sector.

In Denbighshire, Coleg Cambria operates the above model but also runs an agricultural programme 3 days a week Tuesday-Thursday for year 11 students (15 year olds) to come to college and infill into Entry/Level 1 groups (around 5 learners a year).

- They have a Learning Support Assistant with them from the local authority
- A member of the Denbighshire team is on-site each day to support with any issues
- Coleg Cambria is paid £140.40 per learner per week from Denbighshire Council.

These learners have been with Coleg Cambria through the School Link programme in year 10 but then leave school before completing the second year of their GCSEs. They join either at entry or level 1 group, with their post-16 learners and follow the same qualification with a view to them then progressing onto level 2 with the Coleg when they turn 16 the following academic year.

The local authority arranges transport.

3. Do you have any other observations or comments about the Junior Apprenticeships programme or similar school/college partnerships specifically as a way to improve engagement with young people who are disengaging from education or training, and/or struggling within a school setting? Are there any practical implications of delivering Junior Apprenticeships/similar provision for FE colleges' wider post-16 provision

Further Background/Case Studies

The 14-16 pathways programmes, including Junior Apprenticeships, provide a valuable alternative to the traditional GCSE academic schooling system, particularly benefiting those who may not thrive in the traditional academic settings. These alternatives are especially crucial in the wake of the pandemic, which saw a significant increase in school absenteeism. Post-pandemic, some schools reported absenteeism rates as high as 42.6%. This issue is more pronounced among learners from a lower socio-economic background, as seen within learners who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), who had an absenteeism rate of 20.1% compared to 9.8% for non-FSM learners during the 2023/2024 academic year. Offering this alternative education pathway for 14–16-year-olds can encourage these students to remain engaged in education, developing practical skills which will help them towards furthering their education or employment opportunities in the future. ⁴

14-16 pathways have had a significant and positive impact on learners' attendance rates at school or college, encouraging students to develop industry specific skills, thus enhancing their employability in the future. The benefits extend beyond the individual, creating growth and opportunities within communities and contributing to the economy in the long term. Estyn's Review of the JA Programme in Wales found that earlier pathways for 14-16 improved levels of engagement and attendance, high success rates

⁴ [Absenteeism from secondary schools: September 2023 to August 2024 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

in vocational qualifications offered and strong progression rates into further education and training.⁵ Bridgend College has seen 86% of their learners on a JA programme progress into another full-time course during the academic year 2022/2023.⁶

The JA program at Cardiff and Vale College has seen high success rates, with an average of 86-88% of learners achieving vocational qualifications and GCSEs. The majority of these learners have progressed to further education or employment opportunities. The benefits of this programme extend beyond short-term achievements, having a significant long-term impact.

Estyn's review of Junior Apprenticeships also found that many of the learners gave positive feedback in relation to the hands-on, practical elements of the JA programme and frequently mentioned the overall positive impact their participation in the JA had on their mental health and wellbeing. Parents of the learners also reinforced this positive sentiment and commented on their children's improved mood and engagement towards learning and wanting to pursue further education and skills courses:

'I experienced better student support, less pointless lessons, a better environment, formed better friendships with people in my class and got good support from my learning coach. The JA programme really helped me achieve excellence. The college saw you as an individual and there was a lot of extra help where that may have been needed. Also in exam season they would offer one-to-one revision to help you achieve your main objective. I became a much better person because of the JAs. If it wasn't for the JA programme I would have no education. I owe everything to them.'

'Junior apprenticeship is helping me a lot – from staff members to well-being. Any problems I have I can talk to staff who help me with problems in college to personal problems. I never got on with my teachers at school which was affecting my education. Smaller classes than school, teachers treat us with respect, the hair and beauty classes, making friends with people that like what I like. The college is fun, I really love the course and we all like bricklaying a lot. I'm learning a lot more than in school, enjoying college gives me something to wake up to and enjoy. I think the college is very suitable for kids like me who can't cope in normal schools. It is a very good opportunity to get a good job when we grow up. I enjoy doing bricklaying and carpentry. I do it to get a good job. It's nice to meet new people and I enjoy exploring the campus at break.'

⁵ [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

⁶ [Junior Apprenticeships - Coleg Penybont](#)

*College is good way to teach kids who are not suitable for school. It's a more hands-on way of learning and it will help me get a good job which is a very good opportunity for me as I didn't work well in school.'*⁷

*'The Junior Apprenticeship program has helped me manage my anxiety and become more outgoing, allowing me to interact better with other students. One of the highlights of my course was achieving my personal targets. I hope to continue with a post-16 automotive course and eventually become a qualified mechanic.'*⁸

Barriers for a wider roll-out:

5 out of the 12 colleges have accessed funding for Junior Apprenticeship programme 14-16. Consequently, learners in many parts of Wales do not have the same opportunities to participate in these schemes compared to others. This can be due to an absence of collaborative arrangements between the local authorities, colleges and schools to support 14-16 pathways. Some colleges also find a lack of consistent information being provided by schools to pupils about alternative options for education and training. Schools should work collaboratively with colleges and local authorities on 14-16 pathways.

Other issues relate to recruiting sufficient numbers of applicants to these courses, especially in colleges with more sparsely populated catchment areas, or in rural areas where travel can be a barrier.

For further information please contact Clare Willims, Policy Officer on clare.williams@colegaucymru.ac.uk.

⁷ [A review of the junior apprenticeship programme in Wales - Estyn](#)

⁸ [Junior Apprenticeships - Cardiff and Vale College](#)

Agenda Item 3.41

Annis Iwan 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

Jack Sargeant AS/MS
Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: PO238

Buffy Williams
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee
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19 May 2025

Dear Buffy,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee on 2 April to discuss routes into post-16 education and training, and for your follow up letter. Please see below the additional information we agreed to supply, and answers to your questions.

Officials will hold discussions with Medr regarding providing apprenticeships data to the committee.

The Education Business Partnership run by Careers Wales

The Careers Wales [Education Business Partnership](#) (EBP) facilitated offer brings employers and schools together to provide opportunities for learners and teachers to meet and interact with them. The EBP aims to inform, inspire, and motivate young people about their future career. Careers Wales facilitates single and multiple employer events/activities with individual and clusters of schools.

Schools are keen to build and strengthen links with employers to enrich teaching and learning across all subjects. Talking about job roles, an organisation or industry and sharing knowledge and experience gives learners a unique insight into the world of work. Careers Wales EBP works with employers and schools and helps to arrange a variety of activities including:

- Presentations to help relate specific subject areas to the world of work (in person or virtually)
- Employer vlogs and videos
- Visits to employer premises
- Careers carousel and employer networking days
- Specific workshops (for example, interview hints and tips or mock interviews)
- Careers fairs

Careers Wales is also available to help employers prepare before they engage with learners. They can give advice and help employers to think of ideas for activities and ways of keeping learners engaged.

In addition, the **Careers Wales School Valued Partner Initiative** gives recognition to employers who support individual schools through a minimum of 3 Careers Wales employer engagement activities per year. Schools can have multiple partners and employers can be partners of more than one school. Careers Wales provides partners with additional support to help them strengthen the relationship. More recently as part of this offer Careers Wales also supports teacher employer encounters, allowing teachers to gain a greater insight of the world of work to take back into the classroom.

Work experience opportunities for year 11 pupils

Careers Wales work with all secondary schools, special schools, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and thousands of businesses (local and national) to provide learners with a breadth of work-related experience opportunities. This offer of support includes supporting learners, teachers and employers.

Careers Wales has facilitated **employer led activities and information events** for learners (EBP offer). Activities can include: employer presentations, site visits, 'World of Work' days, mock interviews and careers festivals.

During 2022-23 and 2023-24, 631 young people were placed into work experience as part of the Tailored Work Experience programme. A November 2023 report identified excellent outcomes for participants.

For 2025-26, Careers Wales have been asked to build a Tailored Work Experience offer within their core offer. This ensures an immediate continuation of delivery. A further 100 learners will be placed on a tailored work experience placement this year.

Over the summer term, during each secondary school's partnership agreement conversation, Careers Wales will ask about current work experience placement offers and explore any needs. Careers Wales will then provide a detailed picture of what is currently on offer, what support has been identified as essential and potential options on what a Careers Wales offer could look like in the future.

Expansion of Junior Apprenticeships across Wales

Whilst most learners will continue to benefit from a purpose-based, broad and balanced curriculum under Curriculum for Wales, Junior Apprenticeships are an alternative offer for a small, but important, cohort of learners who are otherwise at risk of disengaging from education completely.

Given the success of the Junior Apprenticeships programme, which we discussed at Committee, we are keen to see the programme made available in more FE colleges, across Wales. By increasing the Junior Apprenticeships budget by 50% to £600k in 2025-26, we are enabling more learners to benefit from this successful programme.

Positive conversations have already taken place between Medr, Rhondda Cynon Taf local authority and secondary schools, and Coleg Y Cymoedd, to potentially make Junior Apprenticeships available there from September 2025.

Officials continue to work with Medr to scope further expansion of the programme, and will engage closely with colleges, schools and local authorities across Wales as part of this work, to build on this initial expansion. This will feed into work to develop the draft budget for 2026-27 during the autumn.

Separately, we are making good progress in addressing the recommendations made by Estyn in their [thematic review of Junior Apprenticeships](#). Medr's Programme Directory is being updated for 2025/26 to be clear how learners undertaking the Junior Apprenticeship programme will benefit from the new, Made-for-Wales GCSEs in Mathematics, English and Welsh. Officials are also working with Medr to develop more detailed operational guidance which will clarify funding arrangements and set out responsibilities for schools, colleges and local authorities.

Data on Welsh domiciled students whose first choice was a Welsh provider

The Welsh Government does not hold this information. The Committee may wish to contact UCAS for this information.

Scholarships for learners who choose to study through the medium of Welsh

The Coleg Cymraeg has opened doors for more students to study through the medium of Welsh in Higher Education Institutions in Wales. Over 1,900 students have received undergraduate scholarships from the Coleg to study through the medium of Welsh.

By funding lecturing posts, creating learning resources, and offering scholarships to students, the number of courses where it is possible to study them partly through the medium of Welsh has increased. Courses can now be studied through the medium of Welsh across most of the main subject groups, and the Coleg has funded Welsh-medium provision in new fields such as Veterinary Surgery and Dentistry.

The Coleg offers a Main Scholarship of £1,000 a year for up to 3 years to students who study at least 66% or 80 credits a year of their course in Welsh in any subject. There is also an Incentive Scholarship which offers £500 a year for the length of the course to students who study at least 33% or 40 credits of their course in Welsh in any subject.

Subject specific scholarships are available in subjects such as maths, nursing, medicine, and law. Local grants are also available to students from Ynys Môn and Gwynedd who commit to studying through the medium of Welsh. The full list of scholarships is as follows:

- The Gareth Pierce Bursary: £3,000 to study at least 33% of their Maths course in Welsh
- Nursing Scholarship: £500 a year for 3 years to study at least 33% of their nursing course in Welsh

- The 'Defi Vet' Veterinary Scholarship: £500 per year over 5 years to students at Aberystwyth University who follow at least 40 credits per year through the Welsh language
- The Medicine Scholarship: £500 a year to students who are studying a Medicine course at a university in Wales, and studying at least 33%/40 credits of the course in Welsh.
- The Cyngor Môn Scholarship: £500 a year to students who live in the Anglesey area, who are studying at least 33%/40 credits a year of their course in Welsh
- The Cyngor Gwynedd Scholarship: £1,000 a year for up to 3 years to students who live in the Gwynedd area who are studying their whole course (100%) in Welsh
- The Gwilym Prys Davies Scholarship: £1,000 a year for up to 3 years, open to students who are studying Law, who live in the Meirionydd or Rhondda Cynon Taf areas and who are studying at least 66%/80 credits a year of their course in Welsh. This fund is only applicable for courses at Aberystwyth or Bangor universities.
- The William Park Jones Scholarship: £1000 per year, for three years. This fund is open to students who want to study an education degree course (with QTS), who will study at least 66% of their course through the medium of Welsh, and who live in Gwynedd or Anglesey.
- The "Llŷr Roberts Memorial Bursary": a bursary for undergraduate students studying through the medium of Welsh, and is open for any subject. The bursary will sponsor a trip which is linked to the student's studies. The intention is to award up to 4 bursaries each year, worth £500 each.

Timelines on responding to the review of vocational qualifications

As we set out in our written evidence to the Committee, taking forward the recommendations of both the Review of Vocational Qualifications and the Report on Transitions to Employment remains a key priority for Welsh Government. It is important to note that there are many co-dependencies associated with delivery of the recommendations and that the strategic relationship between Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales and Medr is of significant importance in this context.

Our aim in implementing the recommendations is to align with the wider participation agenda, including in relation to the 16-19 local curricula and to work with Medr, Careers Wales, the UK Government and other stakeholders on skills priorities. Working with these partners, our ambition is to create clearer and more accessible pathways for all learners, whilst supporting them to access appropriate guidance and the learning that is the best fit for them.

A focus for us in 2025 is to identify the short, medium, and long-term actions required of Welsh Government and our partners to enable collaborative delivery of the recommendations – some of which have fairly significant lead times for example the introduction of VCSE's, which will be available for first teaching from September 2027.

Action is already underway on many of the qualification-specific recommendations in the Vocational Qualifications Review, being progressed by Qualifications Wales and Medr, in partnership with Welsh Government. Examples include the expansion of sector review stakeholder group membership (recommendation 6), the scrutiny of sector review findings at Board level (recommendation 7), and the development of VCSE's (recommendation 22). Qualifications Wales has also published a [progress report](#) (Sept 2024) on their targeted approach for increasing the number of Welsh medium qualifications available to learners (recommendations 19 and 20).

In terms of the timeline for responding to the review, officials are exploring with key partners the scope to co-produce a draft Vocational Education and Training (VET) Strategy over the next 12 months. Wider stakeholder engagement will follow, and it should be noted that these discussions might impact this timeframe.

As you will be aware, many of the recommendations link to the wider skills agenda, and we will continue to work closely with my Ministerial colleagues, and across Welsh Government, Wales and the UK, to align our policy aims where appropriate.

Attached is an initial timeline for delivery of this work, including setting out our intention to issue a further update in June.

The OECD report you've just published says that, unlike many countries, Wales does not have a measure of completion that sets out the basic competencies that young people are expected to have at the end of formal schooling at 18. It says this means that society focuses on learners achieving three A levels at A*-C rather than a measure that is accessible for all learners. How does the Welsh Government respond to this conclusion? And are you considering acting on it?

It is certainly not the case that Welsh Government focuses solely on those achieving three A levels at A*-C in relation to the achievements of 18-year-olds. Our [consistent performance measures for post-16 learning](#) include both completion and pass rates by students in A levels, vocational qualifications and the Welsh Baccalaureate. It is true, however, that unlike many OECD countries – but similar to all other UK nations – there is no single measure of completion at 18. This is directly linked to the fact that the national curriculum in Wales, England and Northern Ireland extends to the end of compulsory schooling at 16, not 18.

Following the publication of OECD's report, we are developing guidance for Medr on the formation of local curricula for 16-18-year-olds. This guidance will continue to emphasise the importance of students having access to a wide range of courses of study – both academic and vocational – and the role of schools, further education colleges, local authorities and Medr in delivering that. As part of this work, we will also explore with partners how the wider 16 to 19 learning experience can be enhanced for all learners, drawing on the findings of the OECD report and supporting our priority of increasing participation in further and higher education.

Medr's commitment within their [Strategic Plan](#) to 'set ambitious targets for learner outcomes and experiences, acknowledging that measures of success and performance indicators will vary with learner circumstance, need and in differing parts of the sector' will also be important in this context, and we will work closely with them as they take forward this work.

Over and above the creation of Medr, are there any other big structural changes on the table? For example, we've heard arguments from some professionals in favour of a move away from school 6th forms to a full tertiary model post-16.

We do not currently have plans for any further structural changes. Medr is the regulatory body with responsibility for the funding, oversight and regulation of tertiary education and research in Wales encompassing post-16 education, including local authority-maintained school sixth forms.

Medr will work closely with local authorities in assessing the most effective way of organising post-16 education in different areas of Wales. That might vary significantly between local authorities, particularly when considering local transport and travel times, the different preferences of learners, and the need to ensure Welsh-medium post-16 pathways.

To support this, we have amended the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, providing Medr with powers to make proposals to restructure local authority maintained school sixth form education.

Through these amendments, we are establishing a legislative framework that enables Medr to take a strategic approach to the organisation of sixth form provision across Wales. Given Medr's role across post-16 education, it will be able to offer a wider perspective to school sixth-form provision, thereby ensuring it supports choice, progression and also ensuring that unnecessary duplication of provision within the post-16 sector is avoided.

The Medr strategic plan 2025 – 2030 presents a number of high-level commitments aimed not only at providing assurance and robust regulatory conditions, but also at driving improvement in the sector. Much of the detail is expected to be covered in respective annual or operational plans - but at its core there is a focus on learner-centred provision.

Practical examples include the development of a new quality framework and registration system, along with a national plan for accessing Welsh language across the sector. Medr will also bring about a renewed focus on driving innovation and research in the sector in Wales.

We will work closely with Medr as these work areas and others evolve.

14-16 Learner Entitlement

In September 2024 Welsh Government published statutory guidance for schools on [14-16 learning under the Curriculum for Wales](#). The guidance sets out clear national expectations to help provide a consistent approach across all schools for this critical stage of learners' education. Central to the guidance is the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement: the learning that all learners in year 10 and 11 will benefit from under the Curriculum for Wales. More information about the entitlement, and the four components which make it up, can be found in the guidance itself. The guidance comes into force in September 2025, when Year 10 learners will be learning under the Curriculum for Wales for the first time.

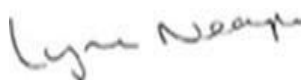
Supporting their learners to make informed choices about next steps is one of the most important roles for schools in year 10 and 11, and this forms an integral part of one of the four components of the learner entitlement: Reflections on learning and progress and post-16 planning. The guidance sets out what this could look like in practice, for example: 'undertaking a balanced options analysis for post-16 pathways, ensuring that learners are fully advised and able to make informed decisions (for example having sufficient information around the options available at further education institutions and other post-16 providers)'.

Given its status within statutory guidance, we have been clear that it will also be important for the learner entitlement to be reflected in information and evidence about schools used for improvement and accountability purposes, including by Estyn in their inspection of secondary schools from September 2025. Other mechanisms to ensure schools are following this guidance include engagement of Medr (in the context of their strategic duty around collaboration) and local authorities.

In relation to published information about schools, we recently consulted on our proposed [14-16 Learner Entitlement Indicators Framework](#). The framework is designed to reflect the breadth of the 14-16 learner entitlement, and to support understanding of its delivery by schools, replacing the “Key Stage 4 interim performance measures” (including the Capped 9). The consultation closed on 14 March, and we are currently analysing the responses.

Please let us know if the committee requires any further information.

Yours sincerely



Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



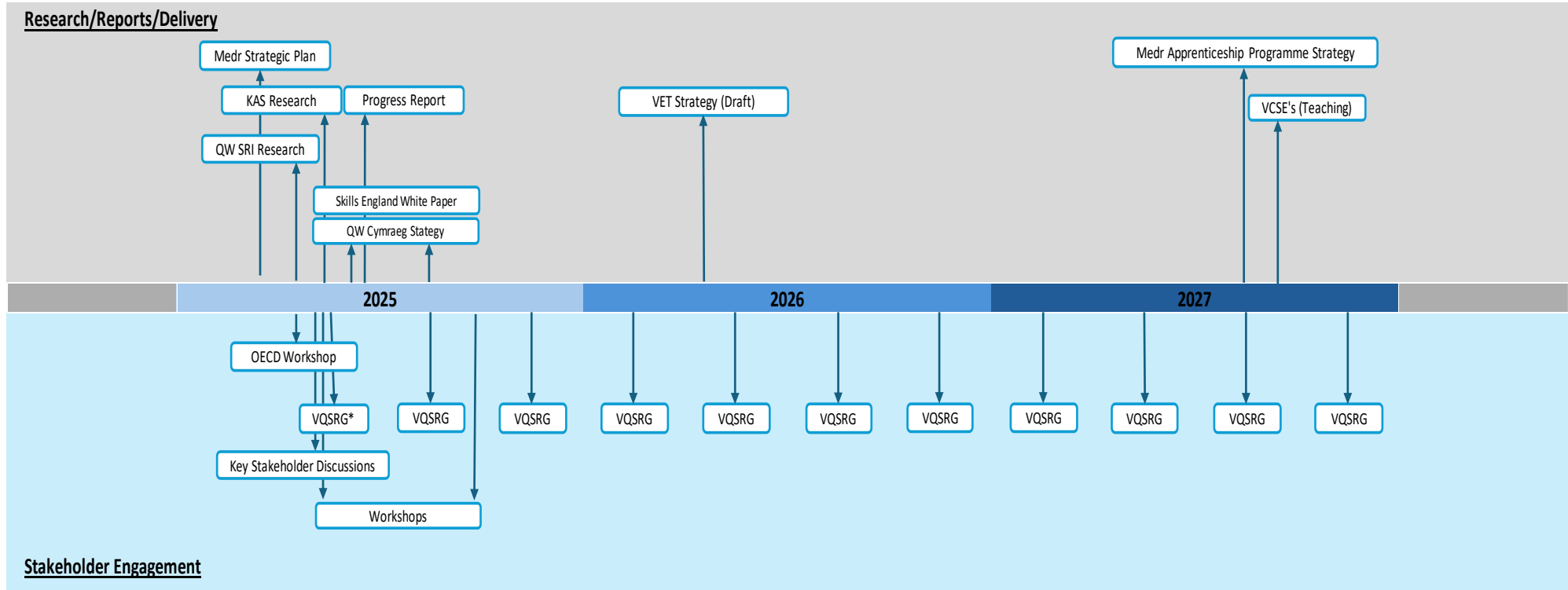
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Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
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Jack Sargeant AS/MS

Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership
Y Gweinidog Diwylliant, Sgiliau a Phartneriaeth Gymdeithasol



*Vocational Qualifications Stakeholder Reference Group

Agenda Item 6

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