

Agenda – Children, Young People, and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 17 December 2025	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.30	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Hybrid

Private pre-meeting

09.15 – 09.30

Public meeting

09.30 – 11.00

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.30

2 Scrutiny of Qualifications Wales Annual Report 2024 – 2025

09.30 – 11.00

(Pages 1 – 19)

Paul Bevan, Chair, Qualifications Wales

Philip Blaker, Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales [Via Zoom]

[Qualifications Wales Annual Report 2024 – 2025](#)

Attached Documents:

Research brief



3 Papers to note

11.00

3.1 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026–27

(Pages 20 – 21)

Attached Documents:

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

3.2 Information from Stakeholders

(Page 22)

Attached Documents:

Information from Women’s Equality Network (WEN) Wales

3.3 School improvement and learner attainment

(Pages 23 – 29)

Attached Documents:

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

3.4 Peer on peer sexual harassment among learners

(Pages 30 – 51)

Attached Documents:

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

3.5 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 52 – 99)

Attached Documents:

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

3.6 Implementation of education reforms

(Pages 100 – 102)

Attached Documents:

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

3.7 Implementation of education reforms

(Pages 103 – 104)

Attached Documents:

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

3.8 Implementation of education reforms

(Pages 105 – 106)

Attached Documents:

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

3.9 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 107 – 108)

Attached Documents:

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

3.10 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026–27

(Pages 109 – 110)

Attached Documents:

Information from the Taith Programme

3.11 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026–27

(Pages 111 – 115)

Attached Documents:

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

3.12 Information from Stakeholders

(Page 116)

Attached Documents:

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

3.13 Forward work programme

(Pages 117 – 127)

Attached Documents:

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

3.14 Forward work programme

(Pages 128 – 133)

Attached Documents:

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

3.15 Forward work programme

(Page 134)

Attached Documents:

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

3.16 Forward work programme

(Pages 135 – 136)

Attached Documents:

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

3.17 Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026–27

(Pages 137 – 138)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chief Executive of Medr from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

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

11.00

Private meeting

11.00 – 12.30

5 Scrutiny of Qualifications Wales Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – consideration of the evidence

11.00 – 11.15

Break

11.15 – 11.20

6 Teacher recruitment and retention – consideration of the draft report

11.20 – 12.30

(Pages 139 – 289)

Attached Documents:

Draft Report

Document is Restricted

Agenda Item 3.1



Ms Buffy Williams MS
Children, Young People, and Education Committee Chair
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

24 November 2025

Dear Ms Williams MS,

As you know from evidence given to the Committee previously and by your own visits to colleges in your constituency and elsewhere in Wales, the further education sector experienced a significant increase in participation over the 2024/25 academic year. This was driven in part by a rise in demand for specific areas of vocational education and training, but also by higher numbers of young people coming in at lower qualification levels.

At your evidence session on the 19 November James Owen, the Medr CEO, highlighted the financial pressures on colleges in the current academic year as a result of another year of sustained increases in participation. We wanted to write to the Committee to endorse the comments made by Medr at the session and to detail some of the specific challenges facing the sector.

Colleges have had another strong year of recruitment with high numbers of young people enrolling in September. At the point of the enrolment freeze date in November, full-time learner numbers were 43,400, which is around 4,400 more than originally budgeted for by the Welsh Government and by Medr. Some provision was made this year to support increased growth, but even allowing for this, the sector is delivering around £15m - £20m of unfunded delivery.

This is of course a positive story about the resilience and success of the Welsh further education sector and of learners making positive choices about their post-16 education journey. The challenge now is to ensure that these additional learners complete their courses and progress to the next stage of their education or into work.

Specifically, it is both the number of additional learners and the support needs associated with their demographic and educational profile that is contributing to the financial pressure. As in the 2024/25 academic year, the profile of the additional learners is that they have the fewest qualifications and are coming in at lower levels of study, with significant literacy and numeracy support requirements which has placed additional strain on college resources. Added to this, to attain a Level 3 qualification many of the learners will need to study in college for three years. They are often young people from the poorest households and need additional financial support to be able to afford the cost of travel and other associated costs of studying. They are the learners most in need and the learners we all have a duty to support.

Our analysis of the Welsh Government's 2026/27 budget is that these pressures will be even more challenging for colleges next year. Additional in-year funding and extra resource for 2026/27 is absolutely essential if we are going to be able to support our learners to complete their qualifications.

Uned 7 Cae Gwyrdd, Greenmeadow Springs, Tongwynlais, Caerdydd CF15 7AB
[Colegau.Cymru](mailto:hello@colegaucymru.ac.uk) hello@colegaucymru.ac.uk Ff: 029 2052 2500
Cwmni Cofrestredig Rhif 2832103 Elusen Gofrestredig Rhif 1060182

Unit 7 Cae Gwyrdd, Greenmeadow Springs, Tongwynlais, Cardiff CF15 7AB
[Colleges.Wales](mailto:hello@collegeswales.ac.uk) hello@collegeswales.ac.uk T: 029 2052 2500
Registered Company No 2832103 Registered Charity Number: 1060182



We want to state clearly to the Committee just how important this moment is for so many young people throughout Wales. Colleges are already having to make incredibly difficult decisions about who they are able to financially support and how they are able to resource the extra learning support many of our young people need. Additional financial support for the sector will make a real difference to the lives and the futures of these young people.

This is why ColegauCymru is calling for:

- Emergency, in-year funding for this academic year to help colleges provide the additional financial and pastoral support they need for learners to stay in college and to complete their courses.
- A revision to the Welsh Government's 2026/27 Draft Budget to reflect the expected demand and costs of learner recruitment and retention in the next academic year.

We would be happy to arrange a visit for yourself or for any Committee Members to meet learners and staff at any college in Wales so you can see for yourself, both the challenges facing the sector, but also the opportunity we have to support learners at this crucial stage in their education.

Best wishes,



David Hagedyk
Chief Executive

Agenda Item 3.2

Women's Equality Network (WEN) Wales – New Report

Thank you for sharing the headline findings from our research on childcare in Wales with the Children, Young People and Education Committee earlier this year.

We are pleased to now share the final report [Transforming Early Childhood Education and Care in Wales](#) and would be grateful if you could bring this to the Committee's attention.

New report [Transforming Early Childhood Education and Care in Wales](#) launched

Our findings and recommendations are informed by quantitative and qualitative research with **over 780 parents in Wales**, a comprehensive review of **recent proposals for ECEC reform**, interviews with **expert stakeholders** within local authorities, the third sector, and the early years sector and a **substantial review of academic and other studies**.

The report covers the following areas:

- What is ECEC for?
- The ECEC landscape in Wales
- The relationship between parental employment, poverty mitigation, and child development
- Does Wales' ECEC system meet key policy objectives?
- What helps or hinders meeting ECEC objectives?
- How Wales can do better

It identifies **five key principles** for effective ECEC, together with a number of recommendations to implement these:

1. Target investment where it has the **biggest impact**
2. Leverage funding to ensure provision is **high-quality, sustainable and equitable**
3. Provide the **right number of hours**
4. **Ensure flexibility** to meet families' needs
5. Provide **integrated services**

Read the [full report](#) and [executive summary](#).

Agenda Item 3.3



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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

Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru

26 November 2025

Dear Buffy

Please find below the information that I committed to provide during my appearance at the Committee session on School Improvement and Learner Attainment on 6 November. The information covers the roles and responsibilities of Dysgu and its collaboration with local authorities; a note on the 'Beyond eFSM' project; and information on the work being carried out to tackle the attainment gap. I will share the recommendations of the Welsh Government's expert panel on literacy when they are available.

Dysgu's remit and transition

Dysgu's objectives, set out in its [remit letter](#) for the period from its establishment on 1 September 2025 until summer 2026, cover the following areas:

- Establishing Dysgu as a strategic organisation with a positive and inclusive culture, robust governance, and arrangements for communicating with stakeholders
- Developing quality assurance processes to ensure its professional learning meets the specified-criteria, and robust arrangements to monitor the impact of its activity
- Leading the development of the professional capabilities of leaders, including by reviewing the existing leadership provision, planning future provision, and delivering the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) pilot programme
- Providing a coherent range of high-quality professional development and professional learning opportunities for teaching assistants and teachers
- Working with partners to ensure professional development and professional learning is research-led, practice-focused and responsive to the needs of school practitioners, leaders and improvement advisers and meets the identified national priorities, including key Curriculum for Wales priorities, such as literacy, numeracy, and curriculum and assessment design

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

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.

- Maximising access for all school practitioners in Wales, including supply teachers, to professional development and professional learning opportunities on Hwb, ensuring equity of access in both English and Welsh.

Dysgu is already delivering the NPQH pilot programme for its first two cohorts, and reviewing and planning further leadership provision. Dysgu is also supporting delivery of the Calm Classrooms, Thriving Minds professional learning pilot, which promotes inclusion and wellbeing by deepening practitioners' knowledge of child development, neurodiversity, and mental health.

Dysgu is working with the Welsh Government on a transition plan for priority areas which will transfer to Dysgu during its transitional year (the 2025/26 academic year). These include:

- Eight-Curriculum for Wales Support Programme grants to support literacy and numeracy
- Literacy and numeracy staff secondees
- Continued funding of the Diversity and Anti-Racist Professional Learning (DARPL) programme
- Continued funding of the National MA Education (Wales) and National EdD (Wales) Doctor of Education programmes.

In addition, Dysgu will also be developing other professional learning in response to my other key priorities of wellbeing and inclusion alongside support for practitioners to develop their practice and pedagogy along their career pathways. It will also take responsibility for updating and developing professional learning and leadership resources on Hwb.

Responsibility for funding professional learning to develop practitioners' skills in undertaking research and enquiry, delivered by universities, will transfer to Dysgu at a later date.

Dysgu's collaboration with local authorities

Partnership working will be key to the way Dysgu operates, and it will be working with stakeholders (including the Welsh Government, local authorities, MEDR, Estyn, Adnodd and universities) to ensure its provision is research-led, practice-focused and responsive to the needs of school practitioners, leaders and improvement advisers and meets the identified national priorities.

Dysgu's remit and provision is designed to focus on the areas where a coherent and consistent national offer will be more effective and impactful than local provision, so local arrangements should not duplicate Dysgu's national provision.

The Welsh Government's Education Improvement Team (EIT) will lead strategic engagement with local authorities and school collaboratives to develop a better flow of system intelligence, to encourage a culture of self-improvement across all parts of the sector, and to connect the discussion around national and local priorities for improvement. It will also share learning and evidence-informed practice between local authorities and schools across Wales. This will feed into Dysgu's development of its

provision, ensuring that the professional learning and leadership support reflects the needs of the system, and is linked to national priorities.

Local authorities' input will be especially important to Dysgu's development of professional learning for school improvement advisors. Dysgu will work directly with local authorities on delivery in a number of areas:

- Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) Induction: The delivery of professional learning to NQTs is a local authority statutory requirement. Dysgu will co-ordinate and develop the programme to ensure that delivery is consistent and coherent across Wales to support all NQTs.
- Teaching Assistants Learning Pathway (TALP): Funding to deliver the TALP will continue to be allocated to local authorities. Dysgu will co-ordinate and develop the programme to ensure that delivery is consistent and coherent across Wales to support all TAs.
- Welsh language and Welsh-medium provision: Dysgu will work with local authorities, the National Centre for Learning Welsh, Cydag and others to plan and deliver its Welsh language provision. Dysgu will co-ordinate and develop the support for practitioners to teach Welsh in English-medium schools, which will continue to be delivered by local authorities, based on developing the knowledge and understanding of effective pedagogy to support learners to consolidate and build on existing language skills. Provision to support practitioners to develop their Welsh language skills will continue to be provided by the National Centre for Learning Welsh, and the National Institute for Learning Welsh in due course. Dysgu will offer specific professional learning for Welsh-medium schools, such as training and networking to develop subject specialism, and effective pedagogy in teaching through the medium of Welsh or bilingually.

'Beyond eFSM' project

The Welsh Government is committed to addressing inequality and supporting children and young people facing socio-economic disadvantage (SED). To do so, it requires robust and valid data on those that are impacted by SED. Currently, eligibility for free school meals (eFSM) is the most widely used identifier of SED at a learner level, as it is a means-tested benefit, thereby reflecting household income. The government and other organisations commonly use and rely on this information as a proxy SED indicator to inform a wide range of activity, including:

Supporting learners: identifying the individual needs of learners and those more vulnerable to the impact of SED circumstances;

Policy development, delivery and monitoring: understanding the level of barriers facing our learners relating to SED and evaluating the impact of intervention, through publicly available statistics and research;

Funding and support: supporting learners and schools based on the number of learners who are eFSM, targeting resource and support where it is needed;

Limitations of the eFSM data as a SED indicator.

Several factors have caused a growing concern that eFSM data is subject to limitations, including that it underestimates levels of poverty, due to application barriers, and that it

does not fully account for a range of other relevant factors for disadvantage than income alone. Other recent factors that have grown in impact include:

UK government policy changes: eligibility rules changed when Universal Credit was introduced, replacing a range of legacy benefits, meaning some learners were no longer eligible. The Welsh Government supported these learners in continuing to provide free meals through introducing [transitional protection](#), but they were not included in the eFSM SED proxy data if they no longer met the new means-tested eligibility criteria. An income threshold was introduced to the eligibility criteria from 1 April 2019.

Welsh government policy changes: The introduction of Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM), means that parents of primary school-aged children no longer need to apply for eligibility for their child to get a free meal. To support learners, we established a national 'Get Help with School Costs' communication campaign, in collaboration with all Welsh local authorities, to encourage parents to continue to check their eligibility and register for free school meals to access additional sources of support.

Cost of living, wages rises and static income threshold criterion: The overall number of learners eFSM have decreased every year since 2021/22, during a period of an increase in the cost of living and where relative poverty has remained stable.

Therefore, it is likely that the eFSM SED proxy is not reflecting the same range of income-related challenges facing the group of learners captured within the data, which reduces our understanding of who is in most need of our support and our ability to evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of our delivery.

In response to these voiced concerns, and recommendations of previous reports, WG is reconsidering how SED is measured amongst learners and embarked on the 'Beyond eFSM' research project.

The three main aims of this research are to:

Understand stakeholder needs – Find out what stakeholder's need from data on socio-economic disadvantage and how they currently use eFSM data and/or other SED data sources

Explore a range of data sources that could meet identified SED data needs – Identify possible improvements to existing data sources and explore potential alternative data sources for measuring socio-economic disadvantage, including any statistical modelling to understand relationships with educational outcomes.

Provide recommendations for a way forward – consider the most appropriate indicator/s or improved methods to overcome the current limitations of eFSM to meet the range of WG and stakeholder needs for learner SED data.

Current position

A report is scheduled to be published on the 10 December 2025, outlining the progress to date and findings from the initial phase of the project. Through a contracted independent research organisation, this phase involved gathering information from a range of stakeholders such as Welsh Government officials and local authorities. The focus was understanding current practices around SED data, what their needs are, for what purposes and what data is used. This includes various dynamics of the data needs

and the features that are required (such as timeliness, frequency, individual or geographical level). There was focus on how the eFSM data is used within that and limitations relating to this and further considerations of alternative data or different methods.

Next steps

Following publication of the report, officials intend to undertake further analysis to:

- explore the data currently available, including eFSM, and the identified potential improvements.
- Assess the feasibility and appropriateness of alternative indicators.

This will primarily involve desk-based research, focusing on Welsh Government's use of the data and considering implications for other public bodies that also rely on it. Looking ahead, the research may recommend moving away from a universal reliance on eFSM data for all services. It is likely that a range of different sources will best suit different needs to provide the most appropriate evidence, but that this will need to be balanced with the need to retain an aligned approach across different areas for particular purposes. It is also recognised that a critical need for individual-level data will remain for certain purposes.

Whilst this project progresses, the landscape continues to change. Any further changes relating to access to Free School Meal provision would further impact on the usability of the eFSM data. Additionally, ongoing work in other portfolio areas will change and may improve usability of eFSM data as an SED indicator, e.g. [streamlining Welsh benefits](#), and the feasibility of using alternative data sources to support e.g. the [Digital Economy Act](#).

In parallel to this project, Welsh Government is looking again at the way funding available through the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is allocated. PDG funding is primarily allocated using eFSM data. However, due to the issues outlined above, we are considering alternative options for allocating PDG funding in the future. The PDG and beyond eFSM workstreams will collaborate on how to better identify pupils affected by SED.

Poverty Attainment Gap Policy Summary

The impact of poverty remains one of the most significant and persistent challenges affecting educational attainment in Wales, exacerbated by the compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, austerity and the cost-of-living crisis. That is why the Welsh Government has prioritised creating a fairer and more inclusive education system. Welsh Government is working on a Theory of Change to enhance our understanding of the poverty attainment gap and what works to tackle it. We have identified six principles based on international evidence and priorities in Wales to guide our work:

- Equity and inclusion
- Data-driven decision making
- Long-term thinking and sustainable planning
- Collaboration and community partnership
- High quality teaching and leadership

- Holistic support for the child

These principles, aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, will be used to develop a clear, collaborative and evidence-informed strategy with stakeholders. This will include embedding the principles in existing interventions and identifying further work areas to deliver meaningful and measurable improvements in attainment.

The Pupil Development Grant (PDG) provides schools with extra funding to remove barriers to attainment for pupils who are care experienced or from low-income households. A budget of £128m has been allocated in 2025-26.

Following a two-part review of the PDG in [2023](#) and [2024](#) by Bangor University and Cardiff Metropolitan University, my officials have been looking at how the PDG is funded and allocated, and how we can better understand the way it is used to support learners. We will build on that work to embed the Theory of Change principles and improve the way the funding works.

We are also working in collaboration with the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to develop a suite of supplementary guidance resources, including specific guidance for the PDG for Early Years and Children Looked After. These aim to support schools in the evidence-informed use of the Pupil Development Grant to deliver equitable, high-quality education for all learners. We intend to publish these resources in the new year.

Our partnership with the EEF provides education practitioners with access to high-quality international evidence to improve education policy and practice. This includes Cymraeg versions of their education toolkits to help them identify and implement interventions to break the link between family income and educational achievement.

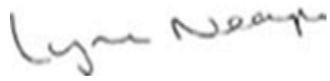
We have made £13.1m available for the School Essentials Grant for 2025-26 to continue funding the grant at the level of £125/£200 per learner, as in 2024-25. Over 89,000 (94%) eligible learners benefited from SEG in 2024-25. The grant helps reduce the worry for families surrounding the purchase of school uniform and equipment and helps children to attend school and take part in activities in the same way as their peers.

We are also working with Children North East to run a series of “poverty proofing” pilots across six clusters in Wales. These pilots work with schools, learners and families to understand the true impact of poverty on day-to-day educational experiences; and to tackle poverty stigma and its impact on attainment.

The Attainment Champions pilot, which concluded in August 2025, facilitated peer-to-peer mentoring among school leaders to tackle the attainment gap. A joint external evaluation of the Attainment Champions and Poverty Proofing pilots is underway. Internal findings will be available from spring 2025 and will be used to inform our overarching strategy to tackle the impact of poverty on attainment. We anticipate the final evaluation findings being ready for publication in Summer 2025.

I hope that this information is helpful, and I would like to take the opportunity to once again thank you for your ongoing work and support on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynne Neagle".

Lynne Neagle AS/MS

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Agenda Item 3.4

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Buffy Williams SM
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay.
CF99 1SN

24 November 2025

Dear Buffy

Thank you for your letter of 15 August regarding your follow-up work and questions in relation to peer-on-peer sexual harassment and pupil absence.

This response provides further information in relation to peer-on-peer sexual harassment. I will write separately in relation to absence.

I enclose two self-explanatory annexes with this letter:

- Annex A provides a detailed response to question 1 (bullets 1 to 4) of your letter.
- Annex B addresses questions 2 and 3.

In relation to question 4, 'any other issues you think are relevant to this issue, which we should consider as part of our follow up work', I have not provided a separate response. I believe the detailed information contained within Annexes A and B provide a comprehensive update on this matter.

I remain committed to advancing this important area of work and will continue to take forward the actions outlined. The steps detailed here are intended to deliver progress and meaningful impact.

Best wishes,

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

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

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.

Annex A – peer-on-peer sexual harassment

Q1 Please can you set out: your updated perspective on the following:

- **peer-on-peer sexual harassment in schools**

The 2023 Student Health and Well-being Survey part of the School Health Research Network (SHRN) included questions on peer-on-peer sexual harassment. The survey is a cross-sectional, school-based survey administered biennially to 11–16-year-olds. In 2023, 129,761 students from 201 schools participated in the survey.

The relevant questions were:

- In the last year, how often have you been called sexually offensive names at school [by boys / girls]?
- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: My teachers take action when they hear pupils calling [boys / girls] sexually offensive names at this school.
- In the last year, how often have you been unwantedly touched or kissed in school [by boys / girls]?

The findings from the work of SHRN are useful in considering the experiences children and young people have, and what we can do both address harms and ensure they feel safe and supported. However, there are constraints to the survey questions which mean that we are unable to fully rely on this data alone and we cannot share detailed findings. For example, the phrase ‘unwanted touching’ may not be perceived by all children and young people as meeting touching which is sexual in nature. Higher reported incidences of unwanted touching or kissing may reflect higher rates of non-sexual unwanted touching (e.g. pushing and shoving in school corridors). A recent consultation on this survey question with the DECIPHer Research Centre’s (which administers SHRN) young persons’ advisory group, supported this viewpoint.

In addition, the survey does not reflect the types of sexually offensive names young people might be describing. Nor does it capture whether name-calling incidents were intended as ‘jokes’ or perceived to be hurtful. Additionally, the survey does not currently capture sexually offensive name calling by those who respond with ‘neither word describes me’ to the gender identity question.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this data does provide useful indicators, and shows that this is an area where we need more robust data to support our work. To this end I have asked my officials to work with the SHRN team to refine the survey questions for the 2025 SHRN data collection exercise. I am keen that we capture more explicit information about peer-on-peer sexual harassment, including both physical and online behaviours, as well as whether the young person reported this experience to a teacher or other adult. Findings will be available from this survey in 2026.

Depending on the findings, it may be necessary to undertake more qualitative research to examine why certain groups of young people are reporting higher experience of sexually offensive name calling and unwanted touching or kissing. In addition, further research to examine how schools address peer-on-peer sexual harassment in their policies and practice, and what is effective would also be insightful.

I have already made a start in this area. Worryingly, research is increasingly demonstrating that sexual harassment is not confined to older teens but happening in the everyday lives of pre-teen children.

It is important not to frame sexual harassment and sexual violence in terms of isolated incidents, but rather to understand the ways in which society, school and youth cultures reinforce gender discrimination and how this relates to sexual harassment and violence. A key barrier to addressing the issue is that sexual bullying, sexism and harassment are normalised, everyday occurrences. Unhelpfully, they are seen as part and parcel of growing up. This normalising of this type of behaviour, alongside children and young people feeling unable to disclose is likely to lead to an under-estimation of the scale of the issue.

This is why the peer-on-peer sexual harassment action plan highlighted that we will consider what research is needed to understand instances of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among primary school-aged children' (action 7.1).

I believe this is an important piece of work and also relevant to several other areas, including, the Curriculum for Wales and the relationships and sexuality education (RSE) code of practice. This sets developmentally appropriate learning that aims to tackle issues such as bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination. Other related activity includes our plans to enhance online safety, now articulated in the digital resilience in education action plan for children and young people; and the violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) strategy.

To support this I have agreed that we commission research to explore pre-adolescent children's understanding and experiences of safe and healthy peer relationships, with a particular focus on peer-on-peer sexual harassment. The insights gathered from the perspective of pre-adolescent children will be used to inform policy decisions and future iterations of the peer-on-peer action plan. This is particularly true in relation to promoting safe and healthy peer relationships, preventing and reducing peer-on-peer sexual harassment and strengthening support for victims and perpetrators.

I will ensure the Committee is kept informed of this work as it progresses.

- **bullying in schools.**

In November 2024 I made an Oral Statement to the Senedd as part of anti-bullying week. In it I highlighted that bullying continues to be a problem and that it has a very real impact, particularly on children's emotional wellbeing. I also said that tackling bullying and its impact is a key priority for me. I want to send the message that bullying is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. I also want to be clear that we will support the victim, and work with the perpetrator to recognise the harm they have done, helping them find a positive way forward.

Once again, the SHRN data provides us with valuable intelligence on the scale and nature of bullying. It highlighted that almost 38% of young people said that they had been bullied in the previous couple of months, up from 32% in 2021. Results are higher than ever previously reported in the survey with more than 40% of girls being bullied compared to over 30% of boys.

Of those responding to the survey, 21% stated they were cyberbullied at least once or twice in the past couple of months. Cyberbullying victimisation was markedly higher among young people who identified as neither a boy nor a girl (44%), relative to boys (17%) and girls (24%).

Bullying victimisation showed some evidence of a social gradient, with learners from less affluent families reporting slightly higher rates of being bullied than those from medium or high affluence families.

In addition, during 2023/24, Childline delivered just under 7,000 counselling sessions about bullying (excluding online). This was a small decrease (-1%) when compared to 2022/23. Among the counselling sessions about bullying in which gender was known, 69% were with girls, 26% were with boys and 5% were with young people identifying as trans or non-binary. In the same period Childline also delivered 932 counselling sessions to children and young people about online bullying, a similar figure to the previous year.

I am concerned about the link between stigma and discrimination over poor mental health as a cause of bullying: though equally, bullying can also contribute to the development of poor mental health and well-being. Tackling the root cause of bullying can be the precursor to improving the child or young person's mental wellbeing.

I want both support for anti-bullying and wellbeing of all children and young people to go hand in hand. Earlier this year we consulted on revised antibullying guidance – 'Rights, Respect, Equality'. This highlighted the need to ensure that all children and young people have positive experiences in school and that they thrive in the nurturing and supportive environment school provides. The consultation attracted over 240 responses, which are currently being analysed, with the revised document expected to be published in the new year.

- **inappropriate behaviour by pupils towards school staff (sexual or otherwise); and**
- **any other issues that relate directly or indirectly to the behaviour of pupils towards each other or towards staff.**

I will take these two points together as they are closely related.

I am not aware of any data on sexually inappropriate behaviour by learners towards school staff. However, we do know that poor behaviour in general is on the rise and is a serious concern and do have some limited data and intelligence on the impact of behaviour of our school staff.

In November 2024 Education Support, the charity dedicated to supporting the wellbeing of school staff, published its eighth annual Teacher Wellbeing Index research report. This highlighted that disturbingly high rates of stress, anxiety, and burnout continue to affect education staff in Wales. This is exacerbated by pupil and parent behaviour, and a lack of support outside school for children and young people. Whilst not a detailed survey, Education Support use YouGov rather than a targeted sample, it does give a flavour of how teachers are feeling. It showed that 58% of staff in Wales (who responded to the original survey) say that they have experienced more incidents of challenging behaviour when compared to last year. Of this group, 80% of staff say this negatively affects their mental health and wellbeing. Also 70% of staff say that challenging behaviours from parents and guardians have increased which has also negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing.

I have been clear that any form of violence or abuse against staff or learners in our schools is completely unacceptable. However, it is important to recognise that poor behaviour in children often stems from underlying factors. I am committed to shifting away from a system that focuses on punishment, towards one that seeks to understand and address the root causes of such behaviour. This could include issues with mental health and wellbeing, unmet additional learning needs, the availability of specific learning support services, or the impacts of the ever-rising cost of living. Sometimes it is about the attitudes of parents and learners towards school more generally. Some children take longer to learn how to regulate their behaviour, meaning they need additional support to manage their emotions appropriately.

It is important we take time to understand the causes of poor behaviour. We advocate the use of trauma informed and restorative practices in schools. Poor behaviour should be addressed through the consistent implementation of appropriate behavioural policies and in taking steps to understand the root causes.

Our Behaviour Summit was held in May where I heard from schools and colleges and other partners about the wider issues they face beyond violence. Just as we were able to at the earlier roundtable on safety and violence, the Summit helped to establish actions for the Welsh Government and other parties to address poor behaviour in the round. The Roundtable and Behaviour Summit marked the beginning of a partnership-based approach to addressing behaviour challenges in our schools and colleges.

As part of this work we undertook a survey of education providers and support staff and published the results earlier in the year. They complement the findings by Education Support, with nearly all respondents reporting an increase in the variety, range, magnitude, and frequency of challenging or disruptive behaviours since the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This suggests that the pandemic may have impacted learner behaviour or may have exacerbated pre-existing trends which has in-turn led to more frequent and varied disruptions in school settings.

The most prevalent concerns among respondents included low-level disruptions, which, while not as severe as physical aggression, still pose a significant challenge to maintaining a conducive learning environment. Over half of respondents working in secondary schools reported concerns regarding learners bringing weapons to school. Although just one in five classified these concerns as 'serious' this raises important questions regarding safety and security for both learners and staff. This is an issue which has been further highlighted following the knife related incident at Ysgol Dyffryn Amman last year.

Physical assaults on teachers were described as a serious concern for almost half of those working in primary schools, further highlighting the need for effective measures to protect teachers and ensure their wellbeing.

Almost nine in ten respondents working within secondary schools reported violence between learners as concerning, however, for most this was considered a minor rather than a serious concern.

Respondents reported feeling poorly supported in dealing with challenging and disruptive behaviour from learners, both from their Local Authority and from parents. Nearly three quarters of respondents reported an increase in the proportions of negative interactions with parents and over 70% reported an increase in the intensity of these interactions.

These themes were built on during the Behaviour Summit and I have committed to listening and finding solutions in partnership. The Five Immediate Actions to tackle behaviour announced after the Summit clearly set out my commitment to ongoing, open dialogue with practitioners, parents, and children and young people. I recognise that sustainable change relies on listening to those with direct experience of our education system.

This is why I am taking forward a wider programme of engagement, with a particular focus on amplifying the voices of practitioners, learners, and parents.

I will make further announcements as this work progresses.

Annex B

Q2 How work is progressing in implementing the accepted recommendations from Estyn's June 2023 report into peer-on-peer sexual harassment among 16 to 18 year old learners in further education (FE) colleges, and its 2021 report on the issue in secondary schools.

Recommendation 6:

Make clear which aspects of Welsh Government education guidance relating to sexual harassment apply to further education colleges and clarify any differences between requirements in schools and further education colleges.

And

Recommendation 7:

Provide appropriate guidance to colleges to help them adopt a co-ordinated and consistent approach to recording and categorising instances of sexual harassment

Welsh Government update October 2025:

Medr is continuing to work collaboratively with colleges, in particular through the Colegau Cymru Learner Experience Group, to identify current and emerging areas of focus to support colleges to tackle sexual violence, harassment and abuse.

Following the colleges autumn meeting, we will work towards funding the next phase of the project, taking account of the Estyn peer on peer abuse review findings and recommendations and the more recent Estyn Learner Behaviour review published today. [Learner Behaviour in Further Education Colleges - Estyn](#).

Q3 the Welsh Government's progress in implementing the following accepted, accepted in principle or partially accepted recommendations from our July 2022 report (including any significant achievements or challenges faced in implementing them, or where the recommendations have been superseded by events, policy changes or otherwise):

Recommendation 1:

The Welsh Government and Estyn must adopt/continue to use the definition of sexual harassment used by Estyn in its 2021 report 'We Don't Tell our Teachers', including the specific examples of peer on peer sexual harassment Estyn used in its work with pupils.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Complete. The multi-agency action plan adopts this definition and it will be the definition utilised when commissioning any further research or reviews in this space.

Recommendation 2:

The Welsh Government must create a Young People's Advisory Board, made up of a representative sample of young people across Wales, to co-design the Welsh Government's response to peer on peer sexual harassment.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Putting children at the heart of policy making, including involving them directly in policy development, is important to the Welsh Government. It gives them a voice in shaping policies that affect them; and we also have a commitment to involve them under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Ensuring they have the opportunity to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have those views taken seriously.

To achieve this requirement, we will and do reach out to children and young people in a variety of ways. In the context of the issues raised within this report, it is important that we engage a broad number of children and young people, and that we continue to innovate in the ways in which we engage. This will enable us to capture not just the views of as many children and young people as possible, but also to ensure that those voices and experiences represent the diversity of the young people of Wales.

Some examples of current engagement include co-operation with Children in Wales, to incorporate the views of the children and young people who are members of the National Young People's Stakeholder Group to help develop our response to this recommendation. We will also seek to engage other Young Voice participants and identify suitable organisations which have expert knowledge and work with children and young people to co-produce the response.

The Keeping Safe Online (KSO) Youth Group is continuing in 2025–26 and the newly appointed members will come together for their first meeting in November. The facilitated sessions provide an opportunity for members to share their online experiences, discuss emerging trends and raise concerns. These insights help inform the most effective ways to support learners, their schools, and their families with a range of online safety issues.

Recommendation 3:

The Welsh Government must carry out an awareness-raising campaign, co-designed with the Young People's Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2), targeted at learners across Wales, to improve understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment.

Welsh Government response: Accept. Last updated July 2025.

WG have commissioned an Our Streets Now project, which is working with schools, staff, and young people to raise awareness about the sources of support available. The project concluded in July 2025, and the findings are being considered with a view to adopting a standardised approach across all Local Authorities.

Recommendation 4:

The Welsh Government must commission a review into peer on peer sexual harassment among primary school-aged children, drawing on the expertise and guidance of children's charities, academics and the Children's Commissioner for Wales as appropriate.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

We are in the process of commissioning a research project which will explore how pre-teen children understand gender and sexual power dynamics in their peer cultures, both in school and online. Using participatory methods, the study will address gaps in knowledge about children's experiences of gender-based bullying and harassment, focusing on equality, diversity, and children's voices. We envisage the project will involve approximately 100 children aged 9-11 from a diverse mix of primary schools across Wales. Outputs will include research report, executive summary, and a co-produced resource to help schools address peer-to-peer sexual harassment. More information is in Annex A.

Recommendation 5:

The Welsh Government must update its statutory guidance to ensure that local authorities collect data from schools on sexual harassment specifically on a monthly basis, analyse that data to identify trends and patterns, and report on their findings at least annually. The data should: be collected on the basis of the definition of sexual harassment adopted by Estyn in its 2021 report; and be broken down by the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

This was addressed in the recent consultation on the draft Rights, Respect, Equality Anti-bullying Guidance which ran from 19 May 2025 to 31 July 2025. We are now analysing the responses to the consultation, and plan to publish the final updated guidance in January 2026. The update will address peer-on-peer sexual harassment issues highlighted in Estyn's December 2021 report and emphasise the importance of data collection and a number of policy teams are in discussion to review data collection in schools.

Recommendation 6:

Estyn must include within its inspection framework for routine school inspections, no later than January 2023, consideration of schools' approaches to keeping records of incidents of peer on peer sexual harassment specifically, how schools interrogate that data to identify trends and patterns, and the extent to which that data informs the development of school-based interventions.

And

Recommendation 12:

Estyn must include within its inspection framework for routine school inspections specific consideration of how schools and colleges respond to and support learners who have reported and/or experienced sexual harassment, and to address the behaviour of individuals who have perpetrated it.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Complete.

Whilst these two recommendations are for Estyn to take forward they have informed us of the following.

Safeguarding is a key strand of Estyn's work. Estyn evaluates the culture of safeguarding during all school and PRU inspections. As part of this, they consider the providers' approaches to dealing with bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment. In evaluating safeguarding culture, inspectors will also take account of how well leaders and governors hold themselves accountable for promoting equity and tackling harassment, and whether learner voice informs strategic decision-making.

During the inspection of local government education services, inspectors must consider, and report on, how well leaders and managers promote equity in the education system. Inspectors must assess how well leaders and managers promote equality and prevent and tackle discrimination, harassment and bullying, including in relation to protected characteristics.

Increasingly, schools are conducting their own surveys and/or using the national SHRN (School Health Research Network) survey findings to identify issues around matters such as peer-on-peer sexual harassment in their own settings, and, in the best cases, adapting their PSE provision accordingly. Inspectors will also consider how well providers use learner voice systematically, including through surveys, focus groups and school councils and how they demonstrate to pupils that feedback leads to tangible improvements in provision and culture. There are also examples of how schools and PRUs record detailed information about aspects of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, to support pupils and respond proactively to unacceptable behaviour. However, providers could benefit from further guidance about what is expected in relation to record keeping. This would help to ensure that there is greater consistency in the records held by schools and local authorities about the types of bullying experienced by young people.

Last academic year (2024-25) Estyn completed two thematic reviews, focussing on behaviour in secondary schools and FE colleges. The behaviour in secondary schools thematic review includes resources for schools which focus on promoting positive behaviours and relationships. Findings and resources from this thematic review were shared with providers in the summer 2025 peer inspector training (there is a peer inspector in nearly all secondary schools in Wales). This academic year, Estyn is conducting a thematic review of healthy relationships, which will follow up on the thematic review on the same topic conducted in 2017.

Estyn will ensure that findings from thematic reviews highlight examples of effective practice in prevention, record keeping, and response and that resources are disseminated to providers to support improvement. We will also explore whether providers evaluate the long-term impact of their interventions, including reductions in incidents and improvements in learner wellbeing.

Recommendation 7:

The Welsh Government must ensure that any reviews into peer on peer sexual harassment in Further Education and primary schools consider how effectively schools and colleges collect, categorise and analyse sexual harassment data to identify trends and develop school-/college-based interventions.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Officials are in discussions with Local Authority Leads to identify ways to improve the reporting and analysis of bullying and harassment in schools.

The Peer on Peer Abuse (POPA) project, led by Cardiff and Vale College, has just finished its second year and will be funded by Medr for a third year.

Medr is continuing to work collaboratively with colleges, in particular through the Colegau Cymru Learner Experience Group, to identify current and emerging areas of focus to support colleges to tackle sexual violence, harassment and abuse.

Following the colleges autumn meeting, we will work towards funding the next phase of the project, taking account of the Estyn peer on peer abuse review findings and recommendations and the more recent Estyn Learner Behaviour review published today. [Learner Behaviour in Further Education Colleges - Estyn.](#)

Recommendation 8:

The Welsh Government must ensure that pupils are taught about the underlying causes of peer on peer sexual harassment – such as unhealthy depictions of sexual relationships and behaviours across society amplified by pornography, social media, online gaming platforms and others – as part of current Personal and Social Education and future Relationships and Sexuality Education curricula.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Within the Curriculum for Wales, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a mandatory cross cutting theme for all learners ensuring they have access to this crucial learning. The RSE Code sets out core developmentally appropriate learning which aims to tackle serious issues such as bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination. Online safety is a particular key feature within the RSE Code and educating young people on how to safely engage with social media is a cross-curricular issue.

RSE is currently implemented in all primary schools and in years 7, 8, 9 and 10 in secondary schools in Wales and will be fully rolled out across all schools and settings by September 2026. To further support schools on RSE, we recently announced a grant of £4.2 million to Stori Wales over three years to ensure nationally consistent professional learning, expertise and advice on RSE for all schools. This will ensure schools have clear, unambiguous support to ensure they follow their legal requirements and give children appropriate support.

We provide dedicated advice for children and young people on the Keeping Safe Online area of Hwb, addressing online sexual harassment alongside related peer pressures such as group chat dynamics, body image, online influences and sharing nudes. These resources aim to develop young people's understanding of these issues and empower them to seek help if they are in an unsafe or upsetting situation.

In April 2025 the Cabinet Secretary for Education met with ten members of the Keeping Safe Online Youth Group (13-16 year olds) to discuss topics arising from the Netflix series 'Adolescence'. Discussions highlighted that influential online personalities can play a significant role in shaping young people's attitudes and behaviours (including misogynistic attitudes and harmful gender stereotypes). We are currently in dialogue with Adnodd regarding the development of a resource to support teaching and learning around healthy relationships and the tackling of harmful gender stereotypes.

Recommendation 10:

The Welsh Government must, alongside the Young People's Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2), carry out a review into the support provided to young people who have experienced peer on peer sexual harassment, with a view to making recommendations to schools, local authorities and others as required to improve the quality and timeliness of that support.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Welsh Government, in co-operation with Children in Wales, will continue to incorporate the views of the children and young people who are members of the National Young People's Stakeholder Group to help develop this response. We will also seek to engage other Young Voice participants, and identify suitable organisations which have expert knowledge and work with children and young people to co-produce the response.

We have commissioned an Our Streets Now project, which working with schools, staff, and young people to raise awareness about the sources of support available. The project concluded in July 2025, and the findings are being considered for adopting a standardised approach across all Local Authorities.

Recommendation 11:

The Welsh Government must ensure that schools and colleges create a culture in which sexual harassment is unacceptable, reports of sexual harassment are taken seriously and responded to promptly and consistently.

And

Recommendation 13:

The Welsh Government must make ring-fenced funding available to schools for all school staff to undertake training on identifying, responding to, and reporting peer on peer sexual harassment. That funding should include provision for schools to provide cover for teachers who are taken out of class, if necessary.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Developing healthy relationships forms part of the mandatory RSE Code. To further support schools on RSE, as part of the Curriculum for Wales grant support programme, a grant of £4.2 million has been awarded to Stori Wales over three years to ensure nationally consistent professional learning, expertise and advice on RSE for all schools. This will ensure schools have clear, unambiguous support to embed healthy relationships across teaching and learning and be able to respond to issues that arise.

Our statutory guidance the “Framework on embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing” supports schools, and education settings in reviewing the well-being of learners from primary through to age 18 (where they study in schools), teachers, school staff and the whole school community. Following a school’s assessment, it should implement a pro-active culture, policies and practices to embed the principles of their Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing. This should support healthy relationships between learners and include actions to support individuals learners experiencing peer to peer harassment, or other forms of behaviour or discrimination detrimental to the wellbeing and mental health of learners.

We recognise that social media plays an increasingly important role in children and young people’s lives and has potential for abuse to occur. To ensure that all staff within schools are aware of the existing resources and guidance available to support them in understanding, preventing and confidently responding to incidents of online sexual harassment, Welsh Government funded the development of a comprehensive training package during 2022-23. The contract was awarded to online safety experts Childnet and we worked closely with local authorities to ensure a strong strategic drive and consistent provision across Wales.

The training package included:

1. **Practical training for Designated Safeguarding Persons (DSPs)**, incorporating scenario-based activities. This training was offered to all 22 local authorities between December and March 2023 (274 education practitioners completed the training).
2. **An online training module**, published on Hwb in March 2023, aimed at all education practitioners. The module has received over 3,000 views.

Building on this foundation and in response to Estyn's findings on peer-on-peer sexual harassment in FE colleges, two additional training sessions were delivered in February 2024. These sessions were designed for both schools and colleges in Wales, helping staff to better understand, prevent, and respond to incidents of online sexual harassment within their settings. Approximately 175 practitioners attended the sessions.

Recommendation 14:

The Welsh Government must work alongside Estyn, relevant academics, and the Young People's Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2) to gather and collate examples of sex and relationships education that learners consider to be effective in addressing peer on peer sexual harassment, with a view to creating a bank of resources for schools and colleges.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

We continue to fund the Spectrum project to provide preventative, educational sessions regarding relationships and sexuality education in schools, for girls and boys, staff and parents. In 2023-24, over 30,000 pupils and 2,000 school staff members engaged with the project. There is also extensive guidance available to support education settings on preventing and responding to child sexual harassment and abuse, including our statutory guidance Keeping Learners Safe and the All Wales Practice Guides.

To further support schools on RSE, as part of the Curriculum support grant programme, the Welsh Government announced in June 2025 a grant of £4.2 million to Stori Wales over three years for the Cwtch Education project to ensure nationally consistent professional learning, expertise and advice on RSE for all schools. This includes a regional co-ordinator for each local authority area.

Recommendation 15:

The Welsh Government must write to local authorities and/or schools to ensure that schools have clear policies on acceptable mobile phone use by learners throughout the school day, those policies are well-communicated to learners, staff and parents, and are consistently enforced by school staff.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Schools are responsible for setting their own behaviour policies; however, support is available on the Keeping safe online area of Hwb. Designed to support online safety in education, the Keeping safe online area on Hwb is full of useful resources for teaching staff to use in the classroom and provides a source of support and guidance for both learners and parents and carers.

Following the National Behaviour Summit hosted by the Welsh Government in May 2025, to deliver on immediate actions to tackle behaviour in schools and accelerate the involvement of key partners, experts and practitioners, a new forum on mobile phone use in schools launched in July.

Forum members include a broad range of stakeholders - practitioners, headteachers, third sector representatives, local authorities, youth parliament and researchers to ensure a broad range of views inform future policy developments.

The forum has been tasked with developing national level guidance on the use and management of mobile phones in schools, supporting positive learning environments, student wellbeing, and safeguarding.

The forum is meeting monthly from September to December to deliver this work at pace. New guidance and initial support for schools on mobiles will launch in early Spring.

These developments are also underpinned by a home nations mobiles group to share research and best practice in relation to this shared issue. This group meets on a quarterly basis.

Recommendation 17:

The Welsh Government must work with local authorities to create and maintain databases of third sector organisations that provide support services for schools and colleges that could assist them in their response to peer on peer sexual harassment.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Complete. The Dewis Cymru platform was identified to host these resources by the Safeguarding in Education Group. SEG members identified relevant organisations to provide the resources which are reviewed every six months by all local authorities. This process is now established, and it is the responsibility of the local authorities to ensure ongoing reviews and updates.

Recommendation 18:

As part of its wider work on raising awareness of peer on peer sexual harassment in schools, the Welsh Government, alongside the Young People's Advisory Board (see Recommendation 2), must carry out an awareness raising campaign targeted at parents and families.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Raising awareness of these concerns is important. To do so effectively, it is crucial that information is designed and tailored for different audiences including learners, parents and carers, and teachers.

Equally when dealing with a sensitive issue such as peer-on-peer sexual assault we need to consider the risk of unintended consequences, or of triggering a response in children which may lead to anxiety, trauma or other negative emotions. Furthermore awareness alone often does not lead to action; messages can be misunderstood and complex information is difficult to simplify without losing crucial details.

Therefore any messaging needs to be seen in context of a wider piece of work to support change. Some examples of this include:

Parenting. Give it time is one of four campaigns under the WG's parenting and family umbrella campaign, Teulu Cymru - <https://www.gov.wales/teulu-cymru>, launched in April 24 and promoted across social media channels, Facebook and Instagram. Parenting. Give it time's website continues to signpost to organisations with information links to support families experiencing incidents of peer-to-peer sexual harassment, including families of LGBTQ+ young people. We have worked closely with colleagues from the LGBTQ+ team to review and add relevant links to the website.

As part of their National Neurodivergence Police Network Group, the National Neurodivergence Team are developing specific resources to support both families and professionals in supporting neurodivergent victims and witnesses of sexual harassment. A Community of Practice on this topic has been scheduled for 2025 to raise awareness and support the development of these importance resources. Date to be confirmed.

Mandatory Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) aims to support learners to build healthy relationships, challenge harmful behaviours, and stay safe online. To strengthen support for schools and settings, we have invested £4.2 million in Stori Cymru's Cwtch Education Project, providing dedicated RSE advisors to support each local authority. This ensures schools (and parents and carers and governors) receive consistent, high-quality support and resources, playing a vital role in delivering effective RSE across Wales.

Recommendation 19:

The Welsh Government must publish its statutory national trans guidance for schools and local authorities no later than January 2023.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle. update October 2025:

The consultation has been delayed to ensure the draft guidance is fully informed by emerging evidence and is taken forward in a way that is sensitive to the needs of children and young people and also reflects the voices of parents. Work is underway to engage with a wide range of parents to ensure their priorities are fully considered in the draft guidance. We are committed to taking forward a consultation at an appropriate time when the guidance is ready. Officials are also exploring how to support schools in the interim to share inclusive practice to ensure that all children and young people feel valued, safe and able to learn.

Recommendation 20:

The Welsh Government must amend its Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence strategy to acknowledge the impact of peer on peer sexual harassment on the safety and wellbeing of female learners.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle update October 2025

A review of the VAWDASV education toolkit has taken place during 2025. Reflecting the out-of-date content and resources, a new, streamlined toolkit is being developed with policy leads from across Welsh Government, which will be taken to the VAWDASV Blueprint's Children and Young People's Workstream for review in the autumn before being made live.

Following a one year extension, the Welsh Government's violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV) team continued to fund the Live Fear Free helpline during 2025/26. Our Live Fear Free helpline is a free, 24/7 service for all victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence and those close to them, including family, friends and colleagues.

To support schools to engage with their families and communities to help identify and tackle issues, as they arise we have published overarching CFS guidance and supplementary guidance on family engagement and community engagement. Officials are engaged directly with Welsh Women's Aid and are facilitating information on specific training that can be accessed to support professionals dealing with VAWDASV.

Recommendation 21:

The Welsh Government must publish the LGBTQ+ action plan no later than autumn 2022. The action plan must acknowledge the scale and impact of sexual harassment on LGBTQ+ learners.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Complete. The final version of the LGBTQ+ Action Plan was published in February 2023.

Recommendation 22:

The Welsh Government must proceed with pace on its work to publish a multi-agency action plan to tackle the problem of peer on peer sexual harassment.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

Complete. We published our peer-on-peer sexual harassment in education settings: action plan on 24 January 2024.

Recommendation 23:

The Welsh Government must provide the Committee with an update in September 2022, and then at 6 month intervals thereafter, on the numbers and proportions of local authorities and schools with RSE leads in place.

Accept. Welsh Government update October 2025:

The Welsh Government continues to work with local authorities, who play a key role in supporting schools and settings by delivering and co-ordinating support, advice and guidance within their authority areas. The Welsh Government highlighted the critical importance of continuing professional support for all aspects of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the Curriculum for Wales annual report for the academic year 2022/23.

To further support schools on RSE, as part of the Curriculum support grant programme, the Welsh Government announced in June 2025 a grant of £4.2 million to Stori Wales over three years for the Cwtch Education project to ensure nationally consistent professional learning, expertise and advice on RSE for all schools. This includes a co-ordinator for each local authority area.

Recommendation 24:

The UK Government and the Welsh Government should ensure that there is sufficient time given to the Senedd for scrutiny of any future Legislative Consent Memoranda relating to the Online Safety Bill.

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle update October 2025

The Welsh Government laid a Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) – Memorandum 1 – on the Bill before the Senedd on 30 March 2022. In total, five LCMs have been laid as there are elements of the Bill which touch upon devolved matters and therefore require the consent of the Senedd. This process also involves the tabling of a motion seeking the Senedd's agreement to what is included in the UK Bill within devolved areas.

The motion for the Bill was agreed by Members votes on the 27th June 2023 with the Deputy Minister for Arts, Sport and Tourism making opening and closing remarks.

Since the Online Safety Act received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023 Ofcom became the regulator for online safety. In this role, and to help establish the new regulations, Ofcom have undertaken several consultations since the Act has passed.

Welsh Government have responded to all consultation and we will continue to work with Ofcom on further improvements to the Codes.

Agenda Item 3.5

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/DB/2844/25

Buffy Williams MS
Chair of Children and Young People Committee

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

27 November 2025

Dear Buffy and Jenny,

I am writing in response to your letter dated 5th November in relation to an update on implementation of “If Not Now Then When? Radical Reform for Care-Experienced Children and Young People” Report.

In your letter you asked for an update on the 20 Recommendations in the Report, including those accepted, in part, and rejected. I am proud of the progress we are making and attach an update on each Recommendation which demonstrates how this Report has driven change. However, we also recognise this work is multi-layered with many interdependencies so will need to continue into the next Senedd term.

Your letter also focused on the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders which was raised by the Children’s Legal Centre. As your report correctly highlighted, there is limited data on these Orders in relation to children and we agreed to look into this further. We have provided an update on this under Recommendation 20. However, this is a matter I am concerned about and we are working with others to pursue this so we have reliable data collected regularly about Deprivation of Liberty Order applications relating to children from Wales, particularly applications by local authorities. We are also committed to support a Wales-wide approach to reduce the number of applications made through investment in earlier intervention and appropriate therapeutic support for children and young people with this level of need.

Yours sincerely,

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

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

Gohebiaeth.Dawn.Bowden@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Dawn.Bowden@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.

Children, Young People and Education Committee – If not now, then when report

Welsh Government update – November 2025

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should introduce legislation using the legislative approach taken for the Nurse Staffing Levels (Wales) Act 2016 to place a duty on local authorities to calculate maximum caseloads for children’s social workers that enable effective, relationship-centred social work, and to take all reasonable steps to maintain those caseloads for all children’s social workers.

Welsh Government response at time of report 2023: Reject

- Caseloads are managed at an operational level, and the allocation of cases should be made in relation to the social workers’ knowledge, experience, workload and what matters to children and families. Complexity in cases varies considerably, and therefore it could be counterproductive to set a caseload maximum.
- Social Care Wales (SCW) is already undertaking a scoping exercise, looking at the workforce planning approaches in all 22 authorities. This includes interviews with key national organisations, stakeholders, and a review of best practice. SCW is also undertaking work to explore training, induction, and support arrangements for newly qualified social workers (NQSW) across Wales. Existing guidance for NQSW [First three years in practice \(socialcare.wales\)](https://socialcare.wales) includes complexity of work. A review is due later this year.
- In recognition of the points raised in this report relating to caseloads, Welsh Government, working with SCW and other social work stakeholders will consider how to best support caseload allocation and management. We will work with local authorities and other employers of social workers to better understand how they currently manage caseloads, including organisations in Wales and other areas where caseload policies are already in place and draw from evidence of what works. In doing so we would consider how to support what matters to children and families and the wellbeing needs of the social work workforce.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Welsh Government, working with Social Care Wales (SCW) and other social work stakeholders, has been considering how to best support caseload allocation and management. Social Care Wales is currently working with all 22 Local Authorities to develop individual action plans to support their progress with workforce planning for social services. This includes developing a network of lead contacts responsible for workforce planning, to enable peer support, action learning and consider the development of national resources. The work is due to conclude in the spring of 2026.
- We continue to engage with social workers on the challenges they face, including caseloads. Further engagement will commence in the new year with the workforce and stakeholders to identify current concerns, strengths and good practice across Wales. This engagement will then inform the Social Work Workforce Delivery Plan, which will set out how we will support the challenges identified. This work is due to conclude in Autumn 2026.

Recommendation 2.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should begin consultation immediately on a comprehensive workforce sufficiency plan to inform the development and implementation of legislation on maximum caseloads of children's social workers. The sufficiency plan should draw and build on the findings of recently completed reports into the social care workforce, and include consideration of:

- routes into social work, including apprenticeships and other forms of vocational routes to qualification;
- pay, terms and conditions, including the feasibility and benefits of extending flexible working;
- career pathways, including how to retain front-line practice alongside progression into management or specialisation as a way to retain caseload experience and prioritise contact time with families; and
- a potential national approach to the pay and conditions of social workers, such as that which oversees the pay and conditions of teaching staff in Wales, to ensure consistency and harmonisation across local authorities.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Reject

- Social Care Wales (SCW) is currently consulting on a Workforce Strategy Action Plan 2023-26 that will support implementation of the second phase of the 10 year Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy [Workforce strategy | Social](#)

[Care Wales](#), which includes social workers. The consultation allows social workers and stakeholders to contribute to the key issues affecting them, and feedback on whether the proposed priorities are the right ones. The Social Work Workforce Plan [Social work workforce plan: 2022 to 2025 | Social Care Wales](#) interprets the strategy for social work, and breaks it down into actions and goals. This is reviewed annually, and we will incorporate feedback from the wider workforce consultation.

- The workforce strategy looks at workforce supply and shape, and improvements have been made in a number of areas such as the increase to the social worker bursary. SCW is undertaking work with local authorities to ascertain current workforce planning approaches for social services and areas in need of development of the future. These findings will be published later in 2023. Scoping work is also being undertaken by the Welsh Local Government Association to explore a more consistent approach to social work terms and conditions.
- A wide range of work is being undertaken to improve the working conditions, training, and options for social workers, such as the social work qualifying (direct entry) sponsored positions for existing employees to progress into social work positions, and a pathway from the vocational social services practitioner (SSP) into gaining a Social Work practice qualification. We will continue to address the above factors raised in this recommendation working with our stakeholders.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Welsh Government, working with Social Care Wales (SCW) and other social work stakeholders, has been considering how to best support caseload allocation and management. Social Care Wales is currently working with all 22 Local Authorities to develop individual action plans to support their progress with workforce planning for social services. This includes developing a network of lead contacts responsible for workforce planning, to enable peer support, action learning and consider the development of national resources. The work is due to conclude in the spring of 2026.
- We continue to engage with social workers on the challenges they face, including caseloads. Further engagement work will commence in the new year with the workforce and stakeholders to identify current concerns and strengths and good practice across Wales. This engagement will then inform the Social Work Workforce Delivery Plan, which will set out how we will support the challenges identified. This work is due to conclude in Autumn 2026.

- The Social Work Workforce plan:2022 to 2025 interprets the strategy for social work specifically, and breaks it down into actions and goals. This is reviewed annually and Social Care Wales is currently developing a Social Work Plan 2026-2029. Engagement will commence with stakeholders in spring/summer 2026 to inform development of a refreshed social work delivery plan, to align with the wider Social Care Workforce Delivery plan. The aim is to publish the Social Work Delivery Plan by autumn 2026.
- A wide range of other work is being undertaken to improve the working conditions, training, and career options for social workers, such as the social work qualifying (direct entry) sponsored positions for existing employees to progress into social work positions, and a pathway from the vocational social services practitioner (SSP) into gaining a Social Work practice qualification. We have also continued our commitment to fund the social worker bursary. Early data for the academic year 2025-26 shows an increase in take up of the bursary.

Recommendation 3.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should lobby the UK Government to amend section 4 the Equality Act 2010 to add 'care experience' as a protected characteristic.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Reject

- The Equality Act (2010) which determines protected characteristics, is a matter that is outside the Welsh Government's legislative competence.
- The Welsh Government is aware of the stigma often faced by care-experienced children and young people in their day to day lives, this was an area Ministers discussed with the young ambassadors at the Inaugural Care Leavers Summit in December, last year. In signing up to the Care Leavers Summit Declaration on 10 May, Welsh Government has committed to working to eradicate this stigma.
- The Corporate Parenting Charter published on 29 June is our first step in achieving this. One of its key principles in the Charter which organisations will be signing up to deliver is to "**Eradicate Stigma** – we Will recognise care-experienced

children and young people for who they are, not just by their experience of being in care. This is because all children have a right not to be discriminated against”.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- As I outlined in my letter of 15 April 2024 to the Children, Young People and Education Committee, we recognise the stigma felt by some care-experienced children and young people in their day to day lives. Through the Transformation Programme for Children’s Social Services and the Care Experienced Summits we have had direct conversations with children and young people with care experience and heard differing views and potential unintended consequences about introducing this. In particular, we heard about the potential to reinforce existing stigma for some care experienced young people, when assigning a protected characteristic.
- The Welsh Government supports local authorities should they wish to include “care-experienced” as a protected characteristic as part of its role as a corporate parent, and is aware both Newport and Bridgend have done so. When implementing this policy, local authorities will need to be aware there are differing views on this issue and potential unintended consequences of assigning care experienced as a protected characteristic.
- In sum we have respected the differing views on this matter and heard not all children and young people with care experience would welcome us progressing this matter with the UK Government. However, we will continue the dialogue and take any learning from Newport and Bridgend so we can understand the impact of introducing “care experience” as a protected characteristic.

Recommendation 4.

As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting (see radical reform #3), the Welsh Government should introduce legislation making specific provision relating to corporate parenting. The legislation should:

- set out which bodies are considered 'corporate parents', including at least local authorities, health boards, NHS trusts, the Welsh Ministers, the Children's Commissioner for Wales, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, and other such bodies as the Welsh Government sees fit following consultation;
- set out the general duties imposed on all corporate parents, including at least duties to: prepare and publish plans relating to the work as corporate parents; to work collaboratively where it would safeguard or promote the well-being of the child or

young persons to do so; publish reports on how they have exercised their corporate parenting responsibilities; provide reasonably requested information to the Welsh Ministers; and follow guidance or directions issued by the Ministers.

- align with further specific corporate parenting duties and recommendations against the relevant sections in this report. See: mental health (page 31), housing (page 94), and higher education (page 102).

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- Welsh Government will be encouraging all public and private bodies to sign up to become corporate parents through the Corporate Parenting Charter which was published on 29 June. The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) will not be a direct service provider to care experienced people in the manner of local authorities, local health boards or the higher and further education institutions which it will fund and regulate. So there is a question about whether it would be a suitable body to act as a 'corporate parent' on a statutory basis as described in the report. However, CTER will have its own statutory responsibilities for care experienced children and young people (see response to recommendation 27 below), and we expect that it will be a signatory to the Corporate Parenting Charter.
- To support the Charter, Welsh Government will strengthen guidance including a dedicated chapter on Corporate Parenting to support local authorities in their role as corporate parents within the Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked after and accommodated children) under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Work is also taking place across Government to identify existing guidance which could also be strengthened to support delivery of the Charter by wider public bodies.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Welsh Government continues to encourage public bodies, third sector organisations and private organisations to sign up to the Charter. Our aim is for all organisations to truly understand corporate parenting, embrace and embed it, and provide the support needed by care experienced children and young people to have the same life chances as other young people in Wales.
- There are 68 organisations (as of November 2025) signed up including all 22 local authorities and all 7 local health boards.

- All organisations signing up to become corporate parents have been asked to complete a corporate parenting pledge detailing their offer to young people and the principles from the Charter they are working to achieve.
- Our intention is for young people to review a sample of the pledges and provide feedback to organisations and we are working with Voices from Care Cymru to arrange this.
- We have also been working to strengthen the guidance for local authorities through a dedicated chapter on Corporate Parenting within the Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked after and accommodated children) under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. A 12-week public consultation on the proposal to include in the chapter closed on 27 October and analysis of the responses is underway with the plan to lay a revised Code before the Senedd in the new year.
- Our intention alongside developing the corporate parenting chapter is to strengthen the voice of the child within care and support planning and placements in the Code of Practice; and to respond to the recommendations from care experienced children on undertaking placement moves and review meetings as outlined in the Lwc report and feedback from the annual Care Experienced Summits.

Recommendation 5:

As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting (see radical reform 3), the Welsh Government should introduce legislation to give all children the right to a specialist therapeutic mental health support service. They should have a statutory right to have their needs assessed at intervals and to have those needs met. That service should be available from the point at which they are removed from their birth parents to at least the point at which they cease to be defined as a care leaver. It should be separate and independent from existing mental health services and specialise in trauma-informed mental health support.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government recognises the impact of the challenges faced by care experienced children, including the potential to be further traumatised by the systems which are there to support them if services are not delivered effectively.

- From a mental health perspective, all children in Wales have equal rights to the access of specialist therapeutic mental health support services under current mental health legislation. The Mental Health Measure (2010) has established positive rights for people with mental health problems, whether diagnosed or not, to obtain help at a sufficiently early stage avoiding the risk of further mental health decline.
- However, we recognise that children in care can face additional and complex challenges to their mental health and wellbeing and more needs to be done to intervene early and prevent, as far as is practicable, the disproportionate numbers of looked after children needing CAMHS and specialist mental health support.
- We have developed the NYTH/NEST framework which is a tool to help service providers develop and deliver services which enable them to hold onto babies, children and young people with trusted adults who are suitably trained, trauma informed and have easy access to expertise to support them. The framework aims to create a whole system approach with services integrating and working together so that resources and expertise can be co-ordinated to identify and provide the right mix of services needed to protect that child's health and wellbeing.
- Through local initiative and with the support of the Regional Integration Fund we are already seeing some excellent examples of services coming together to deliver holistic support in this way.
- Work is now underway to develop a service specification for CAMHS which will set out the Government's expectation of CAMHS services in Wales, and how it works with other services to establish the necessary arrangements to deliver integrated care. The National Framework for Children's Services will set out our similar expectations for Local Authorities around integration. As part of this and drawing on the best practice we are already seeing across Wales, our ambition is that we can set out a consistent approach using the key principles of NYTH/NEST to providing timely, integrated, person-centred care for all looked after children in Wales.
- In summary, we have work already underway that will strengthen support for children and young people but without the need for new legislation.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- We have now published our all- age [Mental health and wellbeing strategy 2025 to 2035 | GOV.WALES](#), which outlines our approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing for the next 10 years. This strategy focuses on the importance of cross government working and this is particularly important when we are considering the needs of care experienced babies, children and young people.
- The new National Multi-Agency Practice Framework for Children’s Services in Wales has also been published, with the aim to improve consistency of practice across Wales and support a strengths-based way of working across agencies delivering children’s services. Alongside the Multi-Agency Practice Framework we also published Practice Guidance for services delivering therapeutic support to care experienced children and young people. The Practice Guidance steers 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 work compliments the work that has also been undertaken to develop a CAMHS specification as referenced in our previous reply.
- The national service specification for CAMHS sets out the Government’s expectation of CAMHS services in Wales, and how it works with other services to establish the necessary arrangements to deliver integrated care. We have also amended guidance to ensure that care experienced children moving health board areas are not disadvantaged and retain their waiting time status for CAMHS.
- Listening to the voices of those with lived experience and upholding children’s rights is central to our core values in Welsh Government. The guidance was 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 stakeholders, including foster carers, adoptive parents and practitioners. Workshops are being facilitated across Wales November 25 to February 26 to support the implementation of this guidance with the sector.
- We will provide routine updates on the implementation of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, with the first of these expected in May 2026.

Recommendation 6.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should set out in statutory guidance, or otherwise, requirements for relevant public bodies, third sector and independent providers to routinely gather and publish data on all aspects of the care system in addition to that currently published, including the data gaps highlighted in this report. Stakeholders including academics must be consulted as a matter of priority to inform what's needed. The guidance should be sensitive to the concerns of many care experienced people about their care status and the stigma they face, and set out best practice data protection guidelines accordingly. The data should be verified by the Welsh Government and be published in an accessible format at least quarterly where it relates to the social care workforce, and at least annually for all other data.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Reject

- The Welsh Government undertakes a range of data collections regarding children's social care. It has three annual data collections, two of which are at the individual level and cover all [children receiving care and support](#) and another focusing specifically on [children looked after](#). There is also a large data collection of local authority [performance and activity](#), which includes over 50 data items on children specifically. Care Inspectorate Wales will also speak to children and explore their experiences as part of their inspections.
- The Transforming Children's Services Delivery Group is currently reviewing data collation as part of its work on metrics for children's services to more effectively measure progress as we transform children's services in Wales.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- The Welsh Government continues to collect a range of data around children's social care, and meets regularly with local authorities and sector partners to review and improve these data collections. The data is not collected directly from children but is administrative data which is collected by local authorities in the provision of care and support. However, all the data collected adheres to best practice and guidance provided by the Office for National Statistics and the Government Statistical Service.

- The National Office for Care and Support continue to expand the range of publicly available data, and intends to make additional data available by the end of 2025/26. This may include quarterly or monthly data about the capacity and demand of children’s social care services.

Recommendation 7.

The Welsh Government should introduce legislation to give all care experienced birth parents a statutory right to intensive, wrap-around edge-of-care support to reduce the risk of children being removed from their care. The support should include specialist parental advocacy to navigate the social care and family courts systems and should be modelled on evidence-based services such as NYAS’ Project Unity. The support should be available from the 12-week scan of pregnancy (or the earliest point after 12 weeks at which a viable pregnancy is confirmed). If a child is ultimately removed from their birth parents, the support should continue beyond the child’s removal to support the birth parents to come to terms with their loss.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government has, and will continue, to prioritise early intervention and prevention as part of the work of both the Children’s Board and the Transformation Programme of Children’s Services in Wales. We know that projects such as Project Unity play a valuable part in providing emotional and practical help to care experienced mothers and the Welsh Government has been able to provide annual funding of £340,000 for the programme until 2025 reflecting our commitment to supporting care experienced mothers and to keeping families together wherever possible.
- The Welsh Government accepts the recommendation in principle and will consider and explore its asks as part of the delivery of the Transformation Programme.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- The Welsh Government has continued to promote and support preventative interventions to help families remain together. The national roll out of Parental Advocacy across Wales demonstrates our commitment to this.
- Project Unity is currently operating across all 22 local authorities. This year the service has provided 1:1 intervention to 135 young mothers or expectant mothers, offering trauma informed, wrap around support to each person accessing this.

Recommendation 8.

The Welsh Government should ensure universal, nationwide access to successful early intervention/edge of care/preventative services, such as Barnardo's Baby & Me, which have been shown to increase the chance of children being able to stay with their birth parents. Until the long-term cost benefits of these services have been realised, the Welsh Government should develop a long-term, national, sustainable funding model for them, recognising their potential for financial benefits across different public service bodies.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government accepts and acknowledges the positive work being undertaken by Edge of Care Services such as Barnardo's Baby & Me, Reflect and Jig-So, and the benefit that these programmes have on new parents including care experienced young people. The Welsh Government will review the evaluation of these projects when deciding on next steps and future roll out.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- The Welsh Government acknowledges the positive impact of edge-of-care services such as Barnardo's *Baby & Me*, Reflect, and Jig-So. Edge of Care Services play a vital role in supporting children and families including new parents and care experienced young people. As part of our commitment to ensuring these services are fit for purpose and families across Wales have access to evidence based, supportive interventions we are in the process of mapping the availability of Edge of Care Services across Wales.
- At the Multi-Agency Workshop for Children and Families held in September 2025, we highlighted some of these services and explored the work being undertaken to strengthen early intervention, and it was evident there is an appetite amongst public sector leaders to promote better multi-agency working within children's services.
- Through our Transformation Programme we have been working with stakeholders to finalise the Early Intervention and Prevention Framework for Babies, Children, Young People and Families so we have an overarching framework for the

system across Wales. This will form part of the Legacy Report from the Programme which will be published before the end of the Senedd term.

Recommendation 9.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government must work with local authorities, members of the judiciary and other relevant stakeholders to continue the roll-out of the FDAC model across Wales, subject to a successful evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept

The Welsh Government will review the evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan pilot to consider sustainable delivery models for a National Rollout. We will work with local authorities, members of the judiciary and other relevant stakeholder to ensure key partners are involved in advising and scoping future FDACs in Wales.

Financial Implications: Yes, any additional costs will be considerable and will have to be identified from existing budgets.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Following the evaluation of FDAC pilot in Cardiff and the Vale a working group was established to explore next steps. A discussion paper endorsed by the Family Justice Network in September 2025 highlighted the positive aspects of FDAC and proposed expanding a problem-solving court approach across care proceedings, beyond cases involving parental substance misuse. My letter of 16th October 2025 to the Chair of the CYPE Committee shares the working group's discussion paper and next steps for this work.
- We are also in regular communication with the Ministry of Justice and Department for Education to ensure alignment with developments in England, given the non-devolved elements of Family Justice.

Recommendation 10.

The Welsh Government should introduce legislation to give birth parents a statutory right to an ‘active offer’ of an independent support worker when the child is placed on the child protection register or made subject to pre-proceedings to support them to access early intervention services and navigate the social care and family court system. If a child is ultimately removed from their birth parents, the support should continue beyond the child’s removal to signpost the birth parents to services that can come to terms with their loss.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government currently provides annual funding of £300k to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) to deliver a Parental Advocacy Programme in Gwent, via our Sustainable Social Services Grant Scheme. The Programme pairs parents with advocates who assist them in understanding legislation, processes and systems in the child protection and care process. Additionally, advocates assist parents in communicating with their child’s social worker. The programme will run until 2025.
- Our Programme for Government sets out that we are committed to expanding the provision of advocacy services to support parents whose children are on the edge of care, helping to avoid statutory social services involvement, escalation of needs and reducing the risk of children entering the care system.
- We are investing a minimum of £1.5 million of funding over the next 3 years, through the Care Experienced Children Change Fund. This funding will be used to scale up existing Parental Advocacy projects on a regional basis and to ensure new services are established in each of the seven regions in Wales as part of a national roll-out.
- To support consistent service delivery across Wales as part of a national roll out, we are developing a National Framework for Parental Advocacy with third sector partners. This describes the core service criteria that all regions must have in place.

- Academic literature and early reports show parental advocacy to be a promising route to reducing the number of children taken into care. We will use the learning from the Gwent initiative and from the national roll-out to determine whether universal access to parental advocacy should be put in place.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Welsh Government is proud to report that parental advocacy is now available across all regions of Wales, with three providers enabling this: NYAS, TGP, and Mental Health Matters. In 2025-26, Welsh Government allocated £803,399 to these services.
- Welsh Government strongly supports parental advocacy, recognising recent research from CASCADE’s mixed-methods evaluation. This research found that advocacy helps parents feel heard, improves engagement with social workers, and can strengthen collaboration in child protection processes.
- As part of our next steps for Parental Advocacy, we will be seeking to establish a Parental Advocacy Forum and establish a clear framework that includes an accessibility criterion to ensure that a consistent offer of advocacy is available across all regions.

Recommendation 11.

The Welsh Government should commission an independent review into the efficacy and availability of parenting assessment placements. The review should consider the ethics, utility and value for money of both residential placements and parent and child foster placements and identify what changes can be made to improve the process for families, and any barriers that need to be overcome to take those steps. The independent review should report no later than December 2023.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government is committed to seeing children and young people living securely with their families, with many fewer ever needing to enter care. For those children who do come into care, we want their stay to be as short as is consistent with meeting their needs, close to home and with strong links to their local community. To achieve this, and to ensure a sustainable network of provision, the shape, scale and structure of current arrangements for the accommodation

of and support for children and young people has to change fundamentally to ensure the development of stable, integrated and locally accountable provision. This will include models of care, wrap-around support and models of ownership.

- During this Senedd term, as part of this work, we will review the arrangements for parenting assessment placements in Wales, including efficacy, availability and models of ownership.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- As part of our commitment to transform services for children, work continues across local authorities to build a sustainable network of provision and to change the shape, scale and structure of current arrangements for accommodation and support for children and young people
- This work includes an assessment of the provision of parent and child placements across Wales, with Welsh Government funding being targeted to strengthen and improve sufficiency at regional and national level with a particular focus on the recruitment and development of parent and child foster carers.

Recommendation 12.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should introduce legislation to provide children in care and care leavers a statutory right to long-term, independent advocacy support on an 'opt-out' basis. Each child should be assigned an advocate when they enter the care system to provide long-term advocacy support across a range of issues, and continue until the child ceases to be a 'care leaver'. Children and young people could opt-out (and then opt back in later) if they wish but must have an allocated advocate or provider at all times during their time in care.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Reject

- Our National Approach to Statutory Advocacy already delivers a statutory right to long-term independent advocacy support that enables children in care and care leavers with the ability to opt in and out as they wish to. This is monitored by the National Provider Forum chaired by Welsh Government.
- A core component of the National Approach is the Active Offer which delivers an absolute long-term right to advocacy from a statutory Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) as part of a clear and consistent pathway deliver their rights and entitlements. This pathway is set out in detail within the [Legacy report](#) published by the Advocacy Task and Finish Group in the Summer of 2022. It ensures social workers inform children of their right to advocacy, helps them to understand the importance and benefits of advocacy and with the child's permission, facilitates independent contact between the child and the advocacy service.
- The advocacy service makes independent contact with the child to meet with them, to make the Active Offer and subsequently confirm to the local authority if the offer has been taken up or declined. The Legacy Report is clear and confirms that *“Opting out does not mean that the child or young person is no longer entitled to an advocate. If the child or young person decides at a later stage that they wish to access advocacy, the social worker will provide the advocacy service with their details to allow them to arrange an introductory meeting with the child or young person.”*
- We absolutely agree with the Committee's assertion that children voices must be heard. We share that position and continue to explore how we can continue to work to ensure that voice is both heard and listened to. The role of the Corporate Parenting Charter will play a critical role in championing children's voice and the Active Offer as part of the National Approach.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Our National Approach to Statutory Advocacy already delivers a statutory right to long-term independent advocacy support that enables children in care and care leavers with the ability to opt in and out as they wish to. This continues to be monitored by the National Approach to Statutory Advocacy Forum chaired by Welsh Government that meets bi-annually. Welsh Government also sits on the National Provider Forum with providers of advocacy services that meets quarterly.

- A core component of the National Approach is the Active Offer which delivers an absolute long-term right to advocacy from a statutory Independent Professional Advocate (IPA) as part of a clear and consistent pathway to deliver their rights and entitlements. This pathway is set out in detail within the [Legacy report](#) published by the Advocacy Task and Finish Group in the Summer of 2022. It ensures social workers inform children of their right to advocacy, helps them understand the importance and benefits of advocacy and with the child's permission, facilitates independent contact between the child and the advocacy service.
- The advocacy service makes independent contact with the child to meet with them, to make the Active Offer and subsequently confirm to the local authority whether the offer has been taken up or declined. The Legacy Report is clear and confirms that *“Opting out does not mean that the child or young person is no longer entitled to an advocate. If the child or young person decides at a later stage that they wish to access advocacy, the social worker will provide the advocacy service with their details to allow them to arrange an introductory meeting with the child or young person.”*
- The National Approach to Statutory Advocacy Forum established two task and finish groups in September 2025: one to look at improving the data collection process for the 'Active Offer' and developing the current performance indicators to gain further insights into uptake rates and a better understanding of why the offer is not taken up by children and young people.
- The second task and finish group is reviewing the Range and Level Toolkit commissioned previously by Welsh Government that assists local authorities and advocacy providers to predict the allocation of advocacy based on numbers of children and young people in the area who are care experienced, on the Child Protection Register, receiving care and support. The task and finish group has been asked to review this toolkit and make recommendations on how this can be simplified and updated to Welsh Government.
- We are committed to ensuring that children's voices continue to be heard, and the National Forum continues to consider ways to improve the offer and ensure all eligible children and young people have information about their rights to advocacy.

Recommendation 13.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government ensure that every child in a residential care home in Wales should have access to both residential visiting advocacy and individual advocacy by:

- revising the arrangements in place under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 to make the provision of residential visiting advocacy in each and every children's home (by a contracted registered advocacy provider) a requirement for registration as a provider of children's care homes in Wales.
- working with other UK governments as necessary to ensure that every child domiciled outside Wales but placed in a Welsh residential care home is offered an individual advocate.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Reject

- Our National Approach to Statutory Advocacy provides access to an advocate to every looked after child in residential care within Wales and outside of Wales. Welsh Government has consistently re-affirmed that advocacy is essential to protect the rights of children and young people and to ensure their views, wishes and feelings are heard, respected and responded to. We have embedded those rights throughout our legislation and guidance across Ministerial portfolios and co-produced partnership arrangements that put those rights into practice through our National Approach to Statutory Advocacy to ensure our shared expectations can be delivered.
- Our National Approach includes a clear and unequivocal Active Offer of advocacy to all children in care, not just those in residential settings, but also to those in foster care or kinship arrangements. Our National Approach also secures the same rights to Independent Professional Advocacy for those who may be subject to safeguarding arrangements or inquiries, as well all children and young people as part of local authorities' wider duties to provide them with care and support under our Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.
- Good advocacy can have a profound effect on the lives of children and young people. Through the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act we have developed and delivered clear descriptors to regulate Independent Professional Advocacy prescribing the standards of both the service provision but also that of the service provider and the responsible individual. We have established and delivered other mechanisms to enable children to be listened to and their views, wishes and feelings acted upon. We are working to strengthen the role of the Corporate Parent through the Corporate Parenting Charter which was published on 29 June. Every child looked after has an Independent Reviewing Officer to listen to them and act as their personal champion in holding professionals and services to account and ensure the duties owed to those children are comprehensively and consistently delivered.

- Welsh Government will however discuss with other UK Governments the provision of advocacy to ensure that every child domiciled outside Wales but placed in a Welsh residential care home is offered an individual advocate.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Through the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act we have developed and delivered clear descriptors to regulate Independent Professional Advocacy prescribing the standards of both the service provision but also that of the service provider and the responsible individual. Both advocacy service providers in Wales, NYAS and Tros Gynnal Plant, had their first inspections in the last year with positive outcomes. We have jointly reflected on the learning from this process.
- We have established and delivered other mechanisms to enable children to be listened to and their views, wishes and feelings acted upon. Every child looked after has an Independent Reviewing Officer to listen to them and act as their personal champion in holding professionals and services to account and ensure the duties owed to those children are comprehensively and consistently delivered. An Independent Reviewing Officer can also request the child be allocated an Independent Visitor.
- Local authorities in Wales are required to ensure every looked after child is entitled to an Independent Visitor. This requirement is part of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014. An Independent Visitor (IV) is a volunteer who visits and befriends a child or young person who is looked after. Children and young people who are looked after have often experienced trauma and a lack of consistent adult relationships.
- The IV may be the one constant adult they have in their life. The unique role of an IV enables children and young people to have at least one consistent, trusting relationship that is built over time. The IV will endeavour to become and remain a stable adult in the child's life who doesn't change when placements or social workers change and will at all times stay child focused.

Recommendation 14.

The Welsh Government should work with Social Care Wales to fund and deliver (including to legislate as needed) a national register of foster carers, to be held by Social Care Wales. The register should set out details of foster carers' approval status, approval review date, local authority location, number of placements, and whether they are a local authority or independent provider. The development of that register should be carried out alongside key stakeholder, such as the Fostering Network, and should involve thorough consultation with foster carers and fostering services providers across Wales.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- Welsh Government recognises the potential benefits associated with a national register of foster carers and it is therefore something that the Welsh Government is keen to explore with the sector.
- A national register would increase the status of foster carers in the team around the child, allowing the role to be more recognised and valued within the sector and by the public. This is especially important as Welsh Government recognises that foster carers are an important part of the social care team supporting the child or young person. It will also address the difficulty foster carers experience when moving from one service to another, by offering a less bureaucratic method of transfer, reducing duplication and delays and will offer a robust safeguarding mechanism which will outline a foster carer's continued suitability to foster.
- However, introducing such a register is complex and will need to be undertaken in a timely and controlled way alongside ensuring it can be appropriately resourced. Initial discussions with the Fostering Network have taken place and the next step is to undertake a scoping exercise to establish what a national register could look like in Wales, any legislative requirements and operational feasibility. This will be done in consultation with our statutory and third sector partners, foster carers and service users.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- We are continuing to consider the introduction of a national fostering register in Wales. This was included in our recent consultation on adoption, fostering, and kinship care, which closed on 27 October. The consultation sought views on how a register could improve transparency, portability for foster carers, and safeguarding, as well as provide national data to support planning and forecasting. We are currently analysing the responses to the consultation, and these will be published in early 2026.

Recommendation 15.

The Welsh Government must ensure that a review of the '4Cs' online database is undertaken, involving key stakeholders and frontline practitioners, to identify and implement improvements to the database to streamline the placement commissioning process.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Childrens Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) was initially developed by Welsh Government with Data Cymru in 2005 as a database library for looking up providers. In 2012, the Childrens Commissioning Consortium Cymru (4Cs) subsequently chose the CCSR platform as an existing Welsh developed, owned and WLGA-managed platform which could be developed to meet commissioning, contracting and procurement needs. It developed an e-tendering portal to deliver the All-Wales Framework (residential and foster care) and to provide placement finding and matching capability.
- This part of the CCSR system is a layer of restricted access to Local Authority and Framework providers only, evaluated and quality assured by the 4Cs, who are compelled under the All-Wales Framework to keep their foster carer, care setting and vacancy information up to date. This is effective and is reviewed as part of daily contract management.
- CCSR does provide details of every foster carer who is a provider on the All Wales Framework plus vacancies, and the equivalent details of all Framework residential care settings and vacancies. This is monitored by 4Cs / Data Cymru and is up to date. It also includes Framework providers CIW inspection reports and provider statement of purposes. CCSR has the capability for all LAs to confidentially and securely add all of their foster carer and residential setting provision onto the system.

- CCSR also provides the details of foster carers from a small number of other agencies who are not on the Frameworks but still see the benefit of subscribing to the service (non-framework providers) but the annual subscription fee they have to pay for the service is a barrier to some smaller providers using the system.
- As this has restricted access, many providers who may have contributed to the committee discussions would not have access to this element of the database and therefore may not be fully clear on its functions or the live nature of its daily use. They would however have access to the high-level resource library which sits above the 4Cs tendering module and is visible to a wider range of stakeholders. The library is part of a forward redevelopment programme which will be informed by stakeholders.
- To support further implementation, Welsh Government will also consider whether it would be feasible to compel all fostering agencies to register on CCSR as part of their registration under RISCA. This work would need to align with our consideration of the introduction of a national fostering register in Wales.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- We are continuing to consider the introduction of a national fostering register in Wales. This was included in our recent consultation on adoption, fostering, and kinship care, which closed on 27 October. The consultation sought views on how a register could improve transparency, portability for foster carers, and safeguarding, as well as provide national data to support planning and forecasting.
- Our ongoing work to explore whether all fostering agencies should be required to register on the Children's Commissioning Support Resource (CCSR) as part of their registration under RISCA is closely linked to this. We will continue to consider this option as we progress work on the fostering register and wider reforms to strengthen commissioning and placement arrangements.

Recommendation 16.

As soon as possible, and no later than December 2023, the Welsh Government should consult with Estyn and other key stakeholders to examine the most recent attainment results relating to care experienced children, ascertain the extent to which

schools are following the Welsh Government's guidance as set out in its 2017 document 'Making a Difference', the barriers that schools face in implementing that guidance, and set out how the Welsh Government and others will improve the school experiences of care experienced children

- **Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept**
- The Welsh Government accepts the recommendation but needs to be undertaken alongside the evaluation of the Virtual Schools Model pilot.
- Every child and young person in Wales has the right to expect an excellent education regardless of their circumstances, including in cases where a child has experience of care. The Welsh Government recognises that good educational attainment can provide the gateway to future stability, security and an independent, fulfilling life. The Welsh Government is committed to equality of opportunity and equity of outcome, ensuring that all our learners are properly supported to achieve their full potential.
- Tackling inequality is a clear priority for the Welsh Government and this includes removing all inequalities in our education system, recognising that to achieve true equity of outcome, some children and young people will require additional, or different, support to achieve their full potential. The Welsh Government recognises that while some children and young people face barriers to learning for reasons of their individual circumstances, there are also systemic and institutional barriers to learning which many children and young people face across Wales. We are taking action to support all children and young people, to overcome these barriers and reach their full potential.
- The Virtual Schools Model is currently in its final year of a three-year pilot, supporting the educational needs of care-experienced children. Thirteen local authorities have been provided with £1m funding to date, with a further £240,000 expected to be allocated in 2023-24. Welsh Government officials are currently undertaking an internal research exercise of the pilot, which will inform the full evaluation phase of the model. In turn, this evaluation will inform the further development of the Virtual Schools Model.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Attainment data on children needing care and support, including children looked after, is published in the [Children Receiving Care and Support \(CRCS\) Census](#).
- We are committed to improving the educational outcomes of care-experienced learners. Our ambitions for education in Wales are set out in '[Our national mission: high standards and aspirations for all](#)'. They include a commitment to equity of outcome in education for every child and young person in Wales.
- We are working with local authorities and schools to embed good practice identified as being effective in promoting the education of care experienced learners. We are promoting this good practice through our National Delivery Group and through the production of a suite of guidance documents. These are intended to help local authorities and schools better understand and respond to the needs of care experienced learners and promote effective practice.
- We have commissioned Estyn to undertake a thematic review into the effectiveness of education provision for care experienced learners. The review will be used to identify and share effective practice to enhance outcomes for care experienced learners in Wales. It is anticipated the final report will be ready by the end of 2026.
- In this financial year we are also funding Adoption UK Cymru to provide training for teachers and other school staff to help them respond effectively to the social and emotional needs of care experienced learners.
- Between 2021 and March 2024 we provided £1.2m to local authorities to pilot a Virtual School Model in Wales, intended to promote the educational outcomes for care experienced children. We commissioned Miller Research to evaluate the pilot and the final report is expected to be published in December 2025. The findings from the evaluation will inform Welsh Government policy aimed to improve the educational outcomes of children looked after in Wales.
- Our commitment to care experienced young people's education is matched by a range of support in schools and for post 16 education. Through the [Pupil Development Grant](#), just over £5.6m will be available in this financial year to specifically support care experienced children in school. All children looked after in reception to year 11 also qualify for the School Essentials Grant. It can be used to buy essentials such as uniform, stationery and equipment.
- The Welsh Government also provides a range of financial support to enable learners to continue their studies in Further Education Institutions.

Recommendation 17.

The Welsh Government should consult care experienced children and young people, kinship carers, third sector organisations, local government and others to better understand the extent to which kinship care is being increasingly used as an alternative to placing children in foster or residential care, the experiences of children in kinship care, and the support needs of kinship carers. As part of that work, the Welsh Government should explore the potential of amending by regulations the criteria that kinship carers are required to meet to be entitled to the same financial support as foster carers.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- Our Programme for Government contains a number of key commitments about a new vision for how children's services in Wales are delivered. Over the course of this Senedd term, we will be working to radically reform children's services in Wales, to ensure they deliver the best possible outcomes for children who are in care. As part of this work, Welsh Government has set up a Special Guardianship Expert Group which will be looking at developing an improved and consistent needs-based approach to supporting Special Guardianship families across Wales. This group has representation from the statutory and third sector alongside service users and as part of its work it will look at ways of capturing the views of children and young people. The intention is to widen the scope of this group in due course to look at the use of and support available for kinship foster carers in Wales.
- In addition, Foster Wales is committed to ensuring that kinship foster carers receive the same support as mainstream foster carers and has launched its national commitment which is an agreed package of training, support, and rewards consistently available to all foster carers (mainstream and kinship) in Wales through all 22 local authority fostering agencies in Wales.
- Foster Wales is also committed to ensuring that kinship foster carers receive the same financial support as mainstream foster carers. One of the aims of our current work on fees and allowances is to ensure consistency, alongside other elements of the financial support to all approved foster carers. Currently all approved foster carers across Wales (including mainstream and kinship foster carers) are paid at least the national minimum allowance to meet the needs of children in their care. In addition, all local authorities pay an enhanced allowance/fee to mainstream foster carers.

- Through Foster Wales and the harmonisation of fees and allowances work, we are seeking to ensure that the availability of an enhanced allowance/fee is available to all approved foster carers (including both mainstream and kinship foster carers) providing they are assessed to meet the eligibility criteria as set out in the enhanced allowance eligibility policy.
- The current legal framework, under the Fostering Panels (Establishment and Function) (Wales) Regulations 2018, necessitates kinship foster carers reaching the same standard of suitability to foster as mainstream carers. The only difference for kinship foster carers is that they are approved to be a foster carer for a particular child under these regulations. Welsh Government is aware that many practitioners, panels and decision makers have struggled with the fitness for purpose of the current regulatory framework for kinship foster care.
- To aid the fostering sector, Welsh Government is currently undertaking a scoping exercise to consider legislative changes that could be introduced to enable an alternative and more ‘fit for purpose’ way forward for the assessment of kinship carers.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- We have been working in partnership with Foster Wales to review the financial support provided to foster carers (both mainstream and kinship). This work builds on the findings of the 2021 report “*The Cost of Care – and the Cost of Not Caring Enough*”, which highlighted that current allowances often do not reflect the real cost of caring for a child. Feedback from carers and research by The Fostering Network confirm that financial support remains a key concern.
- Our current focus is on developing options to increase allowances, so they better reflect the true cost of care. The initial scoping exercise has identified significant financial implications, and Foster Wales has commissioned further modelling to explore how a phased approach to revised payment structures could be implemented.
- Alongside this, we are progressing changes to the Part 6 Code of Practice to provide clarity on how foster carers, both mainstream and kinship, can access enhanced allowances. These amendments will set out clear eligibility criteria linked to the fostering task and ensure transparency for carers at the point of approval.
- Further paragraphs will be added to the Code to explain arrangements for fully approved foster carers, kinship foster carers and temporarily approved carers under Regulation 26 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Wales)

Regulations 2015. This will help local authorities apply a consistent approach while maintaining flexibility to meet individual needs.

- In parallel, we are progressing regulatory changes to strengthen support for kinship carers and special guardians. For special guardianship, we are introducing a statutory requirement for local authorities to use the national Support Plan template to ensure consistency and clarity in the support offered to families across Wales. For kinship care, we are creating a dedicated kinship foster carer category within the fostering regulations, allowing for a more flexible and proportionate approach to assessment and ongoing support. These changes aim to recognise the unique circumstances of kinship arrangements while maintaining safeguarding standards. The consultation on these proposals closed on 27 October, and we are now reviewing responses with the intention of implementing changes by 1 April.
- In addition, we are working with the Law Commission on its Kinship Care Project, which is reviewing the legal framework to make it clearer and easier for families who care for children. The project aims to simplify the law, clarify rights and responsibilities, and explore reforms to ensure better support for kinship carers and children. Our engagement ensures that Welsh policy developments align with these wider reforms and deliver improved outcomes for children and carers, while also ensuring that Wales has a strong voice in shaping the future legal framework for kinship care.

Recommendation 18.

The Welsh Government and the Association of Directors of Social Services must jointly publish no later than December 2023 an action plan setting out how they will prevent the use of illegal, unregistered accommodation in Wales. The action plan must include an analysis of the number of times it has been used in the last 24 months, with clear timescales and funding allocations to develop safe alternatives.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government remains committed to reducing the overall numbers of children looked after but recognises the challenges for some local authorities of finding or developing suitable placements to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

- This isn't just about increasing capacity. It is also about promoting trauma-informed models of care and ensuring there are appropriate joint commissioning arrangements in place between health, social services and education, so the needs of children are met, and they do not fall between different types of provision. We will continue to work with local authorities to ensure these challenges can be met.
- Under our Eliminating Profit Programme Board, we have established a local authority task and finish group to consider the issue of services operating without registration. This is to ensure placement choice and stability in registered provision meets the needs of, and secures positive outcomes for, our children and young people
- The group is undertaking a review of services operating without registration in order to gain an evidence-based end-to-end understanding of the issues, challenges, effective approaches and potential solutions as well as the associated impacts for children. The review is due to be commissioned shortly and will report later this year.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Working towards the minimal use of unregistered placements is about reducing the demand for placements, increasing capacity and building resilience into arrangements for the provision of suitable placements. These issues are being considered in the context of our wider transformation agenda for children's services and the range of work currently underway to ensure the development of stable, integrated and locally accountable provision.
- A review of specific services operating without registration (OWR) was undertaken to gain an understanding of the types of accommodation and placements that were needed, provision through the OWR arrangement, the age profile of the children, what led them to be supported through OWR arrangements and to establish identified strengths and learning for the future.
- Alongside this, the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS Cymru) commissioned Cardiff University to undertake research on the experiences and views of 11 young people in Wales who have lived in residential care home services operating without registration (OWRs). This addressed a gap in understanding the lived experience of those who have resided in OWR settings including understanding the journey of the young person and how to appropriately manage OWR arrangements where there is no viable alternative. The subsequent report is currently being finalised and is

expected to be published shortly following final consideration by members of Workstream 1 (Expanding and Developing New Local Authority/ Regional Provision) under the Eliminating Profit Programme Board.

- The findings from both pieces of work will be used to inform decision-making around the use of OWR arrangements and their ability to safeguard children and young people and meet their needs.

Recommendation 19.

The Welsh Government should carry out and publish an analysis of the use of unregulated accommodation across Wales for children in care and care leavers up to the age of 21. The analysis should identify the numbers of children and young people in unregulated accommodation, and clearly break that down between accommodation that it considers to provide quality accommodation and support (such as supported accommodation which is required to meet housing standards), and accommodation that does not (such as bed and breakfasts, AirBnBs, hostels, etc.). The analysis should further break down that data into the age and legal status of the children and young people to clearly indicate how many are subject to care orders and how many are care leavers. Once complete, the Welsh Government should set out its policy position in relation to unregulated accommodation, including the action it intends to take alongside local authorities to reduce the use of inappropriate unregulated accommodation in Wales.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government collects data on the number of children aged 16 and over leaving care by age and accommodation at date of ceasing to be looked after. Our published statistical data for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 shows of the 700 young people aged 16 and over who left care between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 670 (96%) were in suitable accommodation at the date they ceased to be looked after. Accommodation is regarded as suitable if it provides safe, secure and affordable provision for young people. The proportion of young people in suitable accommodation has increased from 92% in 2016-17 when data began being collected.
- 28% of young people in suitable accommodation were with parents or relatives and 26% were in ordinary lodgings without formal support. The proportion of young people in ordinary lodgings without formal support has generally increased since 2018-19, as has the proportion in semi-independent transitional accommodation (about 18%). The proportion of young

people with parents or relatives, in independent living and in suitable supported lodgings have generally decreased over this time.

- Bed and breakfasts are considered unsuitable accommodation, in addition, other types of accommodation are considered to be unsuitable if they clearly expose the young person to risk of harm or social exclusion. The number, and the proportion, of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation has decreased in recent years. The number of care leavers in unsuitable accommodation decreased by 5 (14%) from 35 to 30 compared with the previous year, equating to 4% of care leavers being in unsuitable accommodation at the point of leaving care during 2021-22. This is the lowest proportion since data began being collected in 2016-17.
- Whilst it is difficult to see in what circumstances a child under 16 would be placed in an unregulated service as they would be in need of care which would mean the service would need to be registered, we are keen to learn from England's experiencing of prohibiting under 16s being placed in unregulated placements and will keep this under review.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Working towards the minimal use of unregulated placements is about reducing the demand for placements, increasing capacity and building resilience into arrangements for the provision of suitable placements. These issues are being considered in the context of our wider transformation agenda for children's services and the range of work currently underway to ensure the development of stable, integrated and locally accountable provision.
- The Homelessness and Social Housing Bill which is currently making its way through the Senedd inserts a new duty into the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 for local authorities to take reasonable steps to ensure that suitable accommodation is available for care leavers as they transition from care, it also creates reasonable preference for care leavers as they transition out of support under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (effectively prioritising them for social housing). It is our policy intention to end default use of the homelessness system as a route out of care through these provisions. The Bill requires social services and homelessness teams to establish a protocol for delivering services to care leavers, 16- and 17-year-olds and those leaving the secure estate. It also creates a regulation making power to define the meaning of suitable accommodation so that we can work with the sector to design appropriate accommodation for young people.

Recommendation 20.

The Welsh Government should carry out an immediate analysis of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders across Wales for the past 24 months, broken down by local authority which has responsibility for the child, age of the child and the length of the order, and which should be published no later than December 2023. The Welsh Government and the Association of Directors of Social Services should jointly publish no later than December 2023 an action plan setting out how they will reduce the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders in Wales. The action plan must include clear timescales and funding allocations.

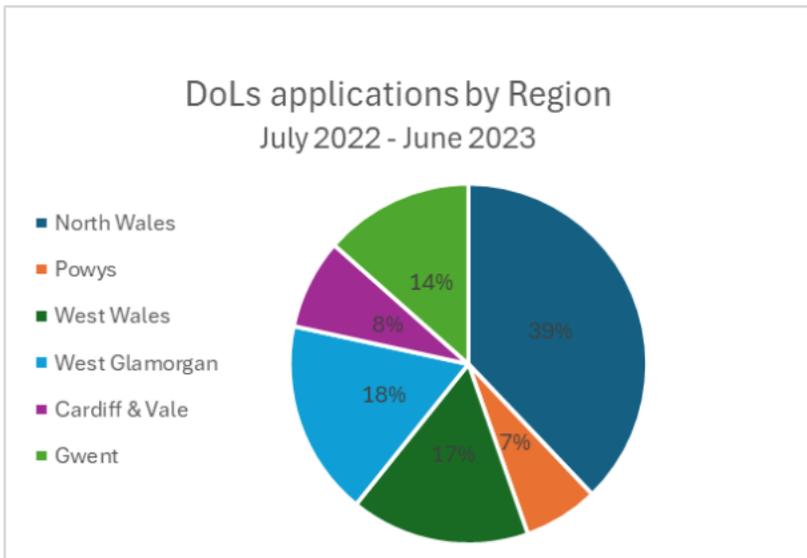
Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- The Welsh Government will carry out an analysis of the use of Deprivation of Liberty Orders across Wales for the past 24 months, broken down by local authority which has responsibility for the child, age of the child and the length of the order.
- The results of this analysis will feed into the Welsh Government's Transformation Programme for Children's Services.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- There is a cohort of children and young people with highly complex histories and with multiple intersecting needs, whose behaviours are seen as too risky and challenging to be suitable for most children's settings, including children with complex mental health needs who do not meet criteria for detention under the Mental Health Act. In recent years in England and Wales this has led to an increase in the use of Deprivation of Liberty (DoL) Orders under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court.
- Our Transformation Programme already included two important strands to reduce the need for DoL Orders: to develop alternative therapeutic homes for children with complex needs and to provide additional specialist support for children with complex needs who may be on the edge of care. This is to ensure that where it is safe, families stay together and where children cannot remain with their families they are cared for, in safe and appropriate accommodation, as close to home as possible.

- We found very little data was available on the use of DoL Orders in Wales as this is not part of the annual data collection and the information available from the Ministry of Justice is limited.
- During our exploration of the data available we were fortunate to learn from a report by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory in 2023. Between June 2022 and June 2023, the Observatory collated and analysed children’s cases with DoL Orders in England and Wales to produce the [Children Subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders Report](#). This exercise showed there had been 71 applications for children’s DoL Orders in Wales during that period.
- In terms of geographical splits, there were only 5 local authorities who had not applied for any DoL Orders during that period – the following chart shows the spread by region, and the table ranks local authorities by the range percentage of the total orders.



Percentage of all DoL Orders	Local Authorities within range of DoL Orders
0%	Gwynedd, NPT, Vale of Glamorgan, RCT, Blaenau Gwent

1-3%	Denbighshire, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Merthyr, Torfaen, Monmouthshire
4-6%	Anglesey, Flintshire, Caerphilly, Newport
7-8%	Powys, Ceredigion, Swansea, Cardiff
10-13%	Conwy, Bridgend
15%	Wrexham

- In the same period, 44% of the children under DoL Orders were 13-15 years of age, followed by 35% who were 16–17-year-olds and 21% were 12 and under. Unfortunately, the length of orders was not provided in the data for Wales. However, in the wider research Nuffield found that most children under DoL Orders in England and Wales between July and August 2022 (68.3%) were still subject to a DoL Order almost six months later.
- Nuffield concluded the increase in DoL Orders in England and Wales is likely to be due to rising numbers of older children coming into care coupled with reductions in children placed in custody, closure of secure children’s homes, and falling numbers of inpatient child mental health beds. Likewise, another contributing factor is an increase in local authority awareness about the need to apply to the court for permission to restrict the liberty of children. Finally, there is some evidence that the needs of children referred to secure children’s homes have become more complex, and homes are struggling to meet these needs and keep children safe.
- Nuffield’s research also painted the first accurate picture of what is happening to these vulnerable children, by concluding that:
 - Often there were no alternative placements for these children and the risks due to their own behaviour or the behaviour of others, are so immediate and severe that depriving them of their liberty is the only way they can be kept safe.
 - The children have multiple and complex needs that are not being met, including mental health problems, behavioural and emotional difficulties, and difficulties with education.
 - Their behaviours are often linked to early and ongoing childhood adversity such as abuse, neglect, poverty, racism, and complex trauma.
 - Children deprived of their liberty have little say over what happens to them.

- DoL orders are often intended to be temporary, but many children will continue to have their liberty deprived while living in often unsuitable and illegal placements far from home and their communities.
- In terms of these children's care histories, Nuffield's research concluded that:
 - Social care, health, education and other systems are failing to respond to their needs – during crisis and at earlier stages in their lives and throughout adolescence.
 - This is not the fault of any one agency or service – children and their families are being pushed around different systems with different ways of working, different criteria for accessing support and different legal frameworks.
 - This is a national issue, with many local authorities using DoL orders to keep children safe.
 - There is not one simple solution; we must start with what we know about the children's needs and their circumstances to identify the kind of care they need to meet their needs, keep them safe, and support them to flourish.
 - Changes are required to services so they better meet the needs of children subject to DoL orders.
- Since July 2023 the Ministry of Justice published quarterly data quarterly about DoL Order applications under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court. However, the data on which local authority was making the application was unreliable so this data is no longer published which means we no longer have regional data.
- We recognise there is further work to capture this data in Wales and we are working with others to pursue this so we have reliable data collected regularly about Deprivation of Liberty Order applications relating to children from Wales, particularly applications by local authorities.
- We are also committed to support a Wales wide approach to reduce the number of applications made through investment in earlier intervention and appropriate therapeutic support for the children and young people with this level of needs.
- Due to the long-standing problems accessing local accommodation for children with complex needs, in 2023 we undertook a review of services and implemented a more robust monitoring framework to strategically identify and link developments from a capital stage through to operational via our funding streams. In addition, we have established a Good Practice Forum with a membership of over 180 practitioners across the sector, that is contributing to develop a good practice toolkit.

- Welsh Government has been investing heavily in the development of therapeutic residential accommodation and specialist services for this cohort through the Regional Partnership Boards. In 2024/25 we invested £12.9m of Housing with Care Fund in homes for children and young people.
- Our monitoring across Wales shows a baseline in 2021 of 24 in-house residential homes for children with complex needs providing 105 beds, whilst in the last 2 years that has increased by 21 new in-house homes providing an additional 67 beds. In 2024/25 a total of 13 new in-house homes with 39 beds were opened and 16 new in-house homes are expected to open in 2025/26 to provide a further 64 beds.
- We are also committed to supporting vulnerable families to remain together by providing early intervention and specialist support through the local authorities' Edge of Care services. The Health and Social Care Regional Integration Fund is a 5-year fund to deliver a programme of change through the Regional Partnership Boards until March 2027. This aims to develop integrated care models, including the Supporting families to stay together safely and therapeutic support for care experienced children with complex needs. We invested nearly £23m last year in this model of care and we are expecting the level of spend for 2025/26 and 2026/27 to be similar. This funding helps to support around 6,500 children and their families each year.

Recommendation 21.

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should respond to the concerns raised by NYAS Cymru in oral evidence on 15 February 2023, and by the Children's Society in their written response to our consultation, in relation to incidents of children missing from care. In doing so, it should set out clearly its expectations of local authorities, the police, and other statutory partners in their response to incidents of missing children, and its views on their calls for statutory return home interviews.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept

I wholeheartedly agree with the Committee's conclusion of the absolute imperative to talk to children and young people to try to find out the reasons that led them to decide to take the actions they did. Clear and consistent pathways to raise issues, worries and concerns are equally important to prevent children concluding there is no option but to go missing, as are the subsequent

conversations about why they chose to do so and understand why they believed there was no alternative decision they could take. The outcome of those preventative and post-event conversations share the same outcome which is to help to identify and put in place support to help them with whatever they are going through, and making it less likely that they will make the choice to run away again.

The risks to children and young people when they are missing are clear. There is unanimity across the sector on those risks as there is that it is crucial for everyone to deploy every resource to help children and young people to be able reach a different decision and mitigate episodes where they go missing. We welcome the evidence from NYAS and Children's Society on this issue. We hear the clear messages they have provided in their evidence to the Committee and as part of our continuing work with partners from across the sector to reach consensus and a shared position wherever possible. This is a challenging issue and one where there is not yet consensus on how to resolve opposing views on the policy and practice around missing children. We have brought together third and public sector organisations, as well as the four Police and Crime Commissioners as part of a round table event on this topic.

As a consequence, Welsh Government commissioned Children in Wales to gather the views of children and young people who have been supported because of going missing alongside a separate project to review policy, practice and procedures to see how we may better achieve consensus. Officials are collating and considering the information and conclusions the projects have identified. Initial analysis suggests that children and young people themselves had varying opinions on the value of return home interviews. However, they can be useful if run well and an important way for professionals to help identify patterns of behaviour and put solutions in place. The evidence and opinions that Wales follow the approach elsewhere of mandating Return Home Interviews appears to remain limited. The next step is to share the findings of this work with partners and explore how we can best achieve our shared intention, impact and outcomes as part of coherent and consistent arrangements that empower and enable proportionate approaches that keep children and their views, wishes and feelings at the centre.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- An analysis of the research referred to in the original response to the Committee led to the establishment of a multi-agency Steering Group for Children who go Missing from Home or Care in September 2024. The group's work plan included

- revising the All Wales Practice Guide for Safeguarding Children who go Missing from Care and the Out of Area/Cross Border guidance in relation to children and young people who are placed outside of their local authority area within Wales or placed in England;
 - develop and agree a core multi-agency dataset; and
 - map the current arrangements for the provision of return home interviews/missing debrief meetings.
- The All Wales Practice Guide and Out of Area Cross Border guidance are nearly completed, and we are discussing a re-launch of both with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board currently. For the first time, the All Wales Practice Guide will include an expectation that all children and young people who go missing, whether that is from home or care, are offered the opportunity to discuss this experience. We have been assisted by NYAS and Llamau in this to ensure there is sufficient guidance within the document that regardless of whoever the child identifies as the person they want to speak to, they have some level of knowledge of the purpose of this meeting and the way in which to conduct it that benefits the child.
 - Six months following the re-launch of these guidance documents, we will be consulting with key partners including children, caregivers and professionals to consider how well this is being embedded in practice.
 - In mapping the provision across Wales, we have identified disparity in how return home interviews/missing debrief meetings are held and by whom they are delivered. In some areas, this meeting is undertaken by police officers, in other areas there are commissioned services in place like NYAS and some local authorities have their own 'in-house' provision. In the All Wales Practice Guide we have included an expectation that all children will be offered the opportunity to meet with someone of their choice following a missing episode to consider the reasons they went missing, identify any further safeguarding issues or individual needs that should be addressed and identify ways in which further missing episodes can be prevented.
 - Setting the expectation is the first phase of this work. We will continue to work with key partners to further understand the provision of return home interviews/missing debrief meetings across Wales and explore the implementation of the guidance documents that will assist us in determining the next steps to improve consistency of multi-agency approaches to this.
 - NYAS and Llamau will be invited to join the multi-agency group we will be establishing in Spring 2026 to develop a core data set for child sexual abuse under the ten-year National Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse

due to the strong correlation between going missing and experiencing or being at risk of experiencing child sexual exploitation.

- Additionally, we will be working with NYAS, Llamau and the Innovation and Analysis team in the National Office for Care and Support and other Welsh Government branches involved in data collection and analysis to explore how we can achieve a multi-agency data set for children who go missing from home or care. This group will gradually broaden to encompass other key partners such as police and health.

Recommendation 22.

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should introduce legislation to raise the upper threshold for all of the support offered to care leavers until they are 21 (as set out in sections 103 to 118 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, associated regulations, guidance and codes of practice, including the When I am Ready scheme) to 25 for category 3, category 5 and category 6 care leavers.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept

- The Welsh Government is committed to legislate in this Senedd Term to ensure all care leavers have an entitlement to a Personal Advisor up to the age of 25. These changes can be made via Regulations under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The Welsh Government has previously written to local authorities about this and the expectations for the funding provided.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- Any young person will face challenges in the transition to adulthood with more responsibilities and independent living. We recognise that young people who are care experienced often have additional challenges. These can be about managing changes when leaving care including the expectation to enter ‘instant adulthood’ and have financial and residential independence, where other young people may have parental support to help navigate these challenges.

- Care experienced young people often feel unprepared, experiencing a cliff-edge in support. This means they are often experiencing inequalities in outcomes compared to their peers.
- Since 2017/18 local authorities have received an additional £1m funding to extend Personal Adviser (PA) support for all care leavers aged 21-25.
- Last year we undertook a survey of care leaver services across Wales to establish how many were offering services to care leavers up to the age of 25. The survey concluded that 90% were offering the personal adviser's service to care leavers up to the age of 25, although some confirmed this was on a needs-basis.
- We remain committed to reviewing our secondary legislation in respect of care leavers, including extending care leavers entitlement to a PA up to the age of 25, but intend to do this as part of our wider review of the Part 6 Code of Practice. We await the outcome of current research by CASCADE which is due to report next year, as well as the evaluation of the Basic Income Pilot due in November 2026 to inform this work; any will progress our work co-productively with stakeholders, including care experienced children and young people.

Recommendation 23.

The Welsh Government should amend section 108 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and regulations, guidance and the code of practice relating to the When I am Ready scheme to:

- extend the age limit for all young people who wish to participate in the scheme to 25; and
- remove barriers to the scheme, including the potential for foster carers' approval to be removed; the reduction in payments to fosters carers; and
- consider how young people could enter the scheme and receive all of the support available to them without being required to enter into tenancy agreements with their foster carers.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- Welsh Government recognises that the transition into adulthood can be more difficult for care leavers than many of their peers of a similar age. It is therefore important that these young people experience continuity when they reach adulthood.

This will help ensure they do not experience a sudden disruption to their living arrangements which could have a negative impact upon their emotional stability, education, training or employment, or upon them developing independent living skills.

- The Welsh Government is therefore committed to supporting the When I'm Ready scheme and ensuring that all young people who are in foster care are offered the opportunity to continue living with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday, up to the age of 21, or up to age 25 if they are completing an agreed programme of education or training.
- We are aware there are some challenges with the scheme and during this Senedd will undertake a full review of the When I'm Ready scheme, drawing upon the intelligence that has been gathered about what is working well and what isn't, and collaborating with our stakeholders and service users across Wales in relation to required changes.
- As part of this review, we will consider whether there is a need to amend existing legislation and existing guidance to introduce changes that will further benefit our young people and the carers who support them, alongside providing a firmer footing for the When I'm Ready scheme in Wales. At the same time, we will look at ways of monitoring implementation to ensure a more consistent approach across Wales.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- We will shortly be commissioning a full review of the When I'm Ready scheme. This review will take the form of a two-stage evaluation during 25/26 and 26/27 and will set out options and recommendations for improving the scheme and, ultimately, enhancing the lives of care-experienced children and young people in Wales.

Recommendation 24.

The Welsh Government should carry out a review alongside care experienced young people and other key stakeholders to ascertain how When I am Ready can be extended to young people in residential care, the barriers to that extension and what actions can be taken to overcome those barriers. The review should report no later than December 2023

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- Welsh Government has committed to undertaking a full review of the When I'm Ready scheme during this Senedd term, drawing upon the intelligence that has been gathered about what is working well and what isn't, and collaborating with our stakeholders and service users across Wales in relation to required changes. As part of this review, consideration will be given to the feasibility of young people in residential care being able to access When I am Ready provision.
- The work will be undertaken during this Senedd term with a view to making any necessary legislative changes during the next Senedd's legislative programme.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- As part of the review referenced above consideration will also be given to the feasibility of enabling young people in residential care to access When I'm Ready provision.

Recommendation 25.

The Committee recommends that:

As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting the Welsh Government should bring forward legislation to;

- Amend the Housing Act 1996 to provide that care experienced people have priority in housing allocation.
- Amend the Housing Act 1996 to state that 'local connection' should be disregarded for care experienced people at their election.
- Amend the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 to ensure that care experienced people over the age of 21 retain "priority need" status when homeless.
- Amend the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 so that care experienced people facing homelessness cannot be referred to another local authority due to 'local connection' if they do not wish to be.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept in part

- Our Programme for Government contains a commitment to reform housing law and implement the Homelessness Action Group's recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.

- To progress this commitment an Expert Review Panel is in place to review and make recommendations for legislative reform. The panel was convened in August 2022 and will report in August 2023.
- As part of their deliberations, the panel have considered the experience of homelessness for those who are care leavers and what targeted prevention measures, either facilitated through legislation or via broader policy led mechanisms, would better prevent homelessness for this group.
- Following receipt of the Expert Review Panel's final report the Welsh Government will publish a White paper, setting out our proposals for legislative change to ensure that homelessness is prevented for the majority of those at risk and that, where it cannot be prevented, it is rare, brief and unrepeatable.
- The recommendations of the Children, Young People and Education Committee have informed the ongoing deliberations of the panel and the parallel development work on the White Paper and we are committed to taking action to prevent homelessness for those who are care experienced through these reforms.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- The Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill, introduced on 19 May 2025, will transform the response to those who are homeless in Wales and fundamentally change our homelessness system, to focus on earlier intervention and prevention.
- In recognition of the increased risk of homelessness that care leavers face, the Bill delivers a package of measures that are collectively designed to end use of the homelessness system as a route out of care and improve the transition from care to independent living.
- Social services and local housing authorities will be expected to work together to develop joint protocols for young people, and the Bill will require social services to take reasonable steps to ensure that suitable accommodation is available for occupation, for certain care leavers once they leave care.
- Care leavers owed these duties will be recognised as a group that must be allocated reasonable preference and, therefore, prioritised for social housing allocation.

- This is likely to be a more effective approach to ensuring young people transition from care to independent living without becoming homeless.

Recommendation 26.

The Welsh Government must carry out a review of the support offered to young people by Young Person's Advisors. The review should consider:

- the concerns set out in this report relating to Young Person's Advisors and the pathway planning process;
- the likely impacts on the collective workload of Young Person's Advisors of the reforms set out in this report (particularly those relating to upper age limit for support for care leavers and those relating to opt-out advocacy services for children in care and care leavers); and
- any action required as a result.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Accept

The Welsh Government will carry out a review as detailed by the Committee in this recommendation. This review will inform the work outlined in the response to recommendation 22 which will be to legislate in this Senedd Term to ensure all care leavers have an entitlement to a Personal Advisor up to the age of 25.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

In August 2024 we surveyed local authorities about the services they provide to care leavers, asking for information on current number of PAs, post vacancies, caseloads, recruitment, job description and training specification. This is what we learnt:

- 52% proposed suggestions to improve the PA role or the service, and only 8 local authorities or 38% felt that PAs functions as currently set out were appropriate and current.
- There were 142 full-time equivalent PAs (in 21 local authorities) with caseloads ranging from 10 to 56 cases per PA.
- Most of the local authorities (81%) were either actively recruiting or would need more PAs.
- The vast majority (90%) were offering PAs to care leavers up to the age of 25, although some confirmed this was not universal and was on needs-basis.

- The PA job description varies substantially across Wales and the level of skills and qualifications required seem to be lower than other equivalent professions.
 - Reflective practice or supervision is also not generally used and the caseloads, the number of PAs and the team structure for each local authority also vary considerably.
- We are engaging with care leavers' teams across Wales to create a peer group that will contribute to the development of guidance around the following themes suggested by responses to the surveys:
 - A clear definition of a PA to reduce postcode lottery; including role description, caseloads, supervision, qualifications, training, etc.
 - Accessibility and effectiveness: entitlements for young people, best practice examples, outcome tracking tools, clarification of categories, forecasting demand, etc.
 - Inter-agency working and transition into adult services.
 - Voice of young people in defining the service: what young people need from a PA, preferred terminology and how best to meet their needs.
 - This will ensure the guidance is evidence-based and will encompass best practice for the support care leavers receive including a set of measurable outcomes.
 - In addition, CASCADE is undertaking a study to understand the experiences of young people leaving care, PAs and other stakeholders, about the support from PA teams during the leaving care process. The study will collaborate with participants through co-produced and participatory research methods to develop practice guidelines, future research related to PA practice and improvements in outcomes for care leavers. We are engaging with the study to avoid duplication and ensure we incorporate its findings to the guidance.
 - This work will also inform the review of our secondary legislation relating to looked after and accommodated children.

Recommendation 27.

The Committee recommends that:

As part of umbrella reforms to corporate parenting (see radical reform 3), the Welsh Government should amend the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 to:

- impose a duty to promote tertiary education to care experienced people;
- and add a mandatory registration condition relating to the promotion of the participation, retention, reduction of attainment gaps and support for care experienced people.

Welsh Government response at time of report: Reject

- The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act places a duty on the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) to promote tertiary education to “underrepresented groups” and requires CTER to have a registration condition for providers relating to the participation, retention, reduction of attainment gaps and support for “underrepresented groups”. “Underrepresented groups” is defined in the Act as “groups that are under-represented in Welsh tertiary education as a result of social, cultural, economic or organisational factors”.
- This description is purposely inclusive of care experienced people, and the committee’s report further underlines the need for CTER to work with higher and further education institutions to promote participation by, and equality of opportunity for, care experienced people in tertiary education. The Act as passed will require it to do so.

Welsh Government update – November 2025

- The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act already places clear duties on Medr (the established CTER) to promote participation, retention, and attainment for underrepresented groups, which includes care-experienced learners. To strengthen delivery, we will work with Medr to ensure guidance and monitoring explicitly reference care-experienced learners as one of the captured under-represented groups. Medr’s ongoing consultation on its’ new regulatory system proposes enhanced registration conditions to embed equality of opportunity and learner success, including tailored support for care-experienced learners. Welsh Government will continue to work collaboratively with Medr to ensure alignment with wider commitments such as the Corporate Parenting Charter and the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

Agenda Item 3.6



Buffy Williams, MS,

Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee

Senedd Cymru

27 November 2025

Dear Buffy,

Re: Letter to Qualifications Wales regarding implementation of education reforms

Thank you for your letter, dated 20 October 2025, regarding the implementation of education reforms in Wales. In this letter, I respond to each of your queries in turn.

GCSE Geography

As the regulator of publicly-funded qualifications in Wales, we set Approval Criteria for all priority qualifications designed for 14-19 year olds. Approval Criteria set out our minimum requirements for a qualification, generally including an outline of aspects of its content and assessment. Approval Criteria are used by an awarding body who intends to develop the qualification. Approval Criteria are intended to allow scope for an awarding body to develop the detailed qualification content and assessment requirements so they do not detail all content that may be included.

We worked with a range of stakeholders, including subject experts and practitioners, to co-create the requirements in the Approval Criteria for the new Made-for-Wales Geography GCSE. We consulted on the draft design requirements in Autumn 2022. We carefully considered all feedback before publishing the final version of the [Approval Criteria](#) in June 2023. When developing the Approval Criteria, we also gave careful consideration to the Statements of What Matter and Descriptions of Learning in the National Framework for the Curriculum for Wales.

In line with the intended scope of Approval Criteria, the requirements for GCSE Geography focus on broad geographical concepts that must be covered in the qualification, such as 'place', 'diversity' and 'environment'. The Approval Criteria do not include (or exclude) specific content, such as plate tectonics and ecosystems. We are

Qualifications Wales

Q2 Building, Pencarn Lane
Imperial Park,
Newport
NP10 8AR
☎ 01633 373 222



www.qualifications.wales

Cymwysterau Cymru

Adeilad Q2, Lôn Pencarn
Parc Imperial,
Casnewydd
NP10 8AR
☎ 01633 373 222

of the view that including this level of prescription in Approval Criteria would limit the flexibility for awarding bodies to develop their own qualifications, and would go beyond our remit as a qualifications regulator.

Whilst plate tectonics and ecosystems do not specifically appear in the new specification for GCSE Geography, there are numerous opportunities for learners to consider human impact, inequality and management of geographical events. As outlined in the Approval Criteria, the aims of the new qualification include:

- Demonstrate a geographical viewpoint on values, attitudes and perspectives surrounding the interrelationships between people and their environment
- Appreciate the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies and their interactions with diverse and dynamic physical landscapes
- Foster a curiosity to explore geographical causes, effects and consequences.

Building on these aims, there are content requirements for learners to demonstrate geographical knowledge and understanding of factors affecting geographical events and how environment, people and places adapt over time and scale.

Throughout the Approval Process, we carefully considered compliance against the requirements in the Approval Criteria. We also sought views about how the qualification had been developed from subject experts who were part of our Approval Panel. The Approval Panel for Geography included individuals who are members of the Geographical Association and have significant expertise and experience in this area. We are confident that the new Geography GCSE achieves these aims and incorporates the content requirements effectively.

Tectonic Landscapes and Hazards is an optional theme in the GCSE Geography specification that was available for teaching prior to September 2025. This means that not all learners will have studied this topic in depth before progressing onto AS and A level study. The AS and A level qualifications have been designed to account for this.

WJEC are currently undertaking a targeted review of Approved AS and A levels in Wales to check whether changes to GCSEs require amendments to AS and A levels. They will also check that content is up-to-date. As the GCSEs were designed to support progression to the current range of approved AS and A levels, we do not anticipate significant changes will be needed in the majority of subjects. However, if gaps or inconsistencies are identified, then WJEC will amend the AS and A level specifications accordingly, and submit them to us for approval. If WJEC identify that amendments are required in Geography, an amended specification will be published in September 2026, in readiness for first teaching from September 2027. This will be when the first cohort of learners studying the new Geography GCSE will reach post-16.

GCSE Natural History

We do not currently have plans to develop Approval Criteria for a Made-for-Wales GCSE in Natural History. In 2021, we [consulted](#) on the range of GCSE qualifications that should be made available to support the Curriculum for Wales. Although we did not specifically gather feedback on whether or not to develop a Natural History GCSE, we did not receive any feedback that suggested there was a missed opportunity or demand for such a qualification in Wales.

We will monitor the planned development of a GCSE in Natural History in England. Once developed, if an awarding body wishes to make it available in Wales, they will be able to apply to us for designation. To be designated in Wales, the qualification will need to comply with our [Designation Policy](#). To comply with this policy, the qualification will need to be available in both English and Cymraeg, and must not undermine any of our Made-for-Wales, approved qualifications.

From September 2027, schools will be able to offer a [VCSE](#) and/or a [Foundation qualification](#) in Nature Restoration, and [Skills for Life](#) units in areas such as 'Skills in the Natural Environment' and 'Sustainability in Action'. The specifications for these qualifications are currently being developed by awarding bodies and will be available from September 2026.

I hope that this information is helpful. If you would like any further information or to discuss the content of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me on Philip.blaker@qualifications.wales

Yours Sincerely,



Philip Blaker

Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales



245 Rhodfa'r Gorllewin, Caerdydd, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 gwybodaeth@cbac.co.uk www.cbac.co.uk

245 Western Avenue, Cardiff, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 info@wjec.co.uk www.wjec.co.uk

sent via e-mail

Buffy Williams MS
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

28 November 2025

Dear Buffy

Made for Wales GCSE Geography

Thank you for your letter dated 20th October 2025 about the Made for Wales GCSE Geography.

You noted that you had heard concerns about WJEC's new Made for Wales GCSE Geography which has started to be taught in schools this academic year. In particular, you had heard concerns that the qualification no longer includes plate tectonics or ecosystems in its content.

WJEC developed the qualification to meet the requirements of Qualifications Wales' Approval Criteria. We worked with a range of stakeholders in the development of our qualification, ensuring that the qualification supports the Curriculum for Wales and offers learners a relevant learning experience as well as meeting the requirements of the Approval Criteria. In addition to working with external writers and reviewers, we established a Qualification Development Advisory Group which consisted primarily of subject teacher and we engaged with this group at key stages during the development process to inform our design.

During the development of the qualification, we were mindful of the significant manageability of content concerns raised by teachers across Wales during the lifetime of the legacy qualification and were careful not to overload the qualification. We were also conscious that we needed to allow sufficient time to teach the skills for conducting a high-quality fieldwork investigation and complete one piece of fieldwork in depth.

In the context of the above, there were therefore some difficult decisions to be made about the content that should be included in the new qualification.

The Approval Criteria do not require either tectonics or ecosystems to be included in the subject content, but require coverage of broad concepts such as place, diversity and environment.



245 Rhodfa'r Gorllewin, Caerdydd, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 gwybodaeth@cbac.co.uk www.cbac.co.uk

245 Western Avenue, Cardiff, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 info@wjec.co.uk www.wjec.co.uk

Although plate tectonics is included in our legacy GCSE Geography, it is an optional topic and approximately half of schools in Wales currently do not select it. We understand from discussions with teachers that both plate tectonics and ecosystems are currently taught in the earlier years of secondary school, and in many cases also at primary school. Tectonics is then covered in great depth in the current WJEC AS Level, and again in the A2 course, and ecosystems are in two from four optional themes in A2 Unit 4. We therefore felt that there was more value in covering different content in the GCSE as opposed to teaching the same topics throughout a learner's educational journey to provide greater breadth. The AS and A level accounts for the fact that not all learners will have studied tectonics at GCSE and therefore its removal from the new GCSE does not have a negative impact on progression.

Plate tectonics and to a lesser extent ecosystems do not give the same fieldwork opportunities as the topics included in the new qualification. We have included topics such as Rivers and Coasts for example, that lend themselves to good quality physical fieldwork. In discussion with stakeholders, we were very keen to include both migration and in-depth coverage of climate change and its causes, impacts and management, as these are topics of great relevance to our learners. The final content was selected to give a broad and balanced coverage of key human and physical geography topics that reflected the aims of the Approval Criteria and relevant Statements of What Matter.

We believe the new Made for Wales GCSE Geography is a stimulating combination of key 'traditional' topics such as rivers, coast, settlement and development, and key 'current' topics such as migration, inequality, climate change, and extreme weather and climate. This will serve learners well in terms of a rich and broad learning experience in line with the ethos of the Curriculum for Wales and will provide a solid foundation to further progression in the subject.

In terms of the development of GCSE Natural History, WJEC can only develop Made for Wales GCSEs in subjects specified by Qualifications Wales.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ian Morgan'.

Ian Morgan
Chief Executive

cc Lynne Neagle, MS, Cabinet Secretary for Education



245 Rhodfa'r Gorllewin, Caerdydd, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 gwybodaeth@cbac.co.uk www.cbac.co.uk

245 Western Avenue, Cardiff, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 info@wjec.co.uk www.wjec.co.uk

sent via e-mail

Buffy Williams MS
Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

28 November 2025

Dear Buffy

Made for Wales GCSE Music – on-screen assessment

Thank you for your letter dated 20th October 2025 about on-screen assessments in the Made for Wales GCSE Music.

You noted that you had heard concerns that learners accessing on-screen examinations in June 2027 would be using software and hardware that they have never used before during the exam as papers would only be available in paper format.

The Specimen Assessment Material for the new GCSE Music Unit 3 are currently available in an on-screen format for schools to use/sit with their candidates at any time. All our on-screen exams run through our Surpass software which staff at schools will need to have accounts created by WJEC staff to access the platform. Schools are also welcome to contact e-Assessment@wjec.co.uk for further guidance regarding the setting up of on-screen exams.

You also noted that learners who currently use Chromebooks will also be using an unknown operating system on a laptop, potentially for the first time, and you queried who will be providing the equipment for the exam, with concerns around inconsistencies in the quality of the equipment.

Although the software used for completing on-screen exams is Windows-based only, our software providers are in the process of developing a Chromebook application. This is currently in a pilot phase of testing with a release date yet to be confirmed but we are confident that it will be available to schools by the end of this academic year. The experience for the candidate for the live exam will be the same whether a candidate uses a Chromebook or a Windows-based machine and a candidate will answer the questions in the same way regardless of the device being used.

Finally, you queried who will be providing the equipment for the exam, with concerns around inconsistencies in the quality of the equipment.



245 Rhodfa'r Gorllewin, Caerdydd, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 gwybodaeth@cbac.co.uk www.cbac.co.uk

245 Western Avenue, Cardiff, CF5 2YX
029 2026 5000 info@wjec.co.uk www.wjec.co.uk

The equipment a candidate will use for the exam will need to be provided by the school and we produce guidance detailing the minimum specification of the devices needed to be used during the on-screen exam. We are aware through our membership of joint change management groups with Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales that Welsh Government is working with Local Authorities to ensure schools are prepared for on-screen assessments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ian Morgan'.

Ian Morgan
Chief Executive

cc Lynne Neagle, MS, Cabinet Secretary for Education
Philip Blaker, Chief Executive, Qualifications Wales

Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
Sarah Murphy MS

1 December 2025

Perinatal Mental Health Support – Outstanding Questions

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your recent response dated 12 November regarding the Perinatal Clinical Implementation Network and Uned Gobaith. While we appreciate the time taken to reply and acknowledge that some issues raised previously have been addressed across your two responses, we remain extremely disappointed that, despite our explicit and repeated request for each of our questions to be answered individually, this has not been done.

The Committee asked five specific questions in our letter of 18 July. Your response of 18 September touched on some areas but it did not make clear reference to the questions themselves. For that reason, we reiterated these questions in our letter of 13 October, reflecting the seriousness of the concerns raised by stakeholders. Unfortunately, your latest correspondence still does not provide the clarity required and leaves key issues unresolved.

We therefore request that you provide **full and explicit answers to each of the questions listed below**, without further delay:

1. We note that this [the disbanding of the Network and Lead] is currently a “proposal”. Please can you confirm the status of these proposals, and whether considering is being given to retain the Network and the Clinical Lead Role?
2. What are the reasons for the proposal, and what other options have been explored?
3. Can you also explain why there has not been wider consultation and engagement on the proposals themselves, and clarify whether this will be rectified?

4. If the Network is disbanded, how does the Welsh Government intend to ensure that the inequities which are currently present in the system are reduced and ultimately removed?
5. We would also appreciate an update on when the Mother and Baby Unit in Chester will be open to Welsh families, along with confirmation of the long term status of Uned Gobaith? Finally, when the recommendations from the one year review of Uned Gobaith will be implemented.

Given the significance of these matters for families across Wales, we look forward to a comprehensive response by 9 January so that the Committee can consider this at its meeting on 15 January.

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 3.10

Information from the Taith Programme following the Committee meeting on 27th November 2025

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

I am writing in a professional capacity as Executive Director of the Taith programme. My name is Susana Galván Hernández, and I can be reached at

GalvanHernandezS@taith.wales

I am writing to you on the back of the Committee's meeting of 27th November 2025, where the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026/27 was discussed (item 2 of the Agenda). Particularly, I would like to provide some clarification and additional information in relation to a short discussion that was had during this meeting about the Taith programme, following a question from Mr Russell George on "the importance of Taith", its "value for money" and the qualitative assessment of the impact that the programme is delivering.

In response to the above question, the publication of the "evaluation" of the Taith programme was stated as something that was going to happen soon. However, this information is not accurate. An independent interim evaluation of the Taith programme was already completed in June 2025. The key headlines and the Executive Summary of this evaluation were published on the Taith website on 18th August 2025 and can be accessed on this link:

<https://www.taith.wales/news/independent-evaluation/>

A final independent evaluation of Taith will be carried out at the end of the programme, by 31st March 2028.

In addition to the independent evaluation of the programme, quantitative and qualitative data from all Taith-funded projects are collected on an ongoing basis. These data provide a comprehensive and in-depth level of evidence to understand and measure the effectiveness, value and impact of the programme.

These data and evidence are publicly available on our website and updated regularly:

- Information on applications and participants for all funding calls, across all sectors, since Taith was launched in 2022, as provided at application stage:

<https://www.taith.wales/impact/planned-projects/>

- Detailed information on all the completed projects, searchable by sector, local authority or at individual organisational level. There is an individual project summary for each of the completed projects, including information about the level of grant

awarded, the number of participants/mobilities that have taken place (outward and inward), the percentage of participants from underrepresented groups, the impact of the mobilities, countries of exchange, quotes from participants, etc:

<https://www.taith.wales/impact/completed-projects/>

- A library of Taith Stories providing direct testimonials and experiences of the life-changing opportunities made possible via Taith funding, in different formats (photos, written, video stories, etc). These stories are fundamental in providing a qualitative assessment of the programme, in a way that only quantitative data would be unable to provide. We strongly recommend browsing some of these stories to anyone who would like to better understand the objectives of the programme and its value and impact.

I hope the above information can be shared with members to clarify the point on the evaluation of the programme and also to answer some of the questions put forward about its value and impact – both in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. We are always open to hear about any ideas or suggestions on how we could better articulate and share the impact and success of the programme.

Of course, we are available at any point to answer any questions or clarify any of the information provided.

Best Wishes

Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: PO/JMHSC/0638/25

Buffy Williams MS

Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament

9 December 2025

Dear Buffy,

Following the Children, Young People and Education Committee's Draft Budget scrutiny session on 19 November, we are writing to provide you with further information during the session.

A date when the Integrated Quality Statement on Children's Health will be available.

As stated in my letter of the 12 November, the Integrated Quality Statement for Children's Health will set out clear expectations for health boards to deliver high-quality, equitable and effective health services for children in Wales.

My officials are working closely with the National Strategic Clinical Network for Child Health to co-produce a draft Quality Statement. A period of stakeholder engagement will take place in early 2026. This collaborative approach will ensure the Quality Statement reflects the challenges and priorities for service development and supports a shared understanding of the changes needed, going forward.

I anticipate the final Integrated Quality Statement for Children's Health will be published during March 2026.

A list of policy interventions that affect children and young people, highlighting ones where change is needed to improve performance and delivery in a sustainable way and the areas where new investment is needed.

Work across this portfolio supports a range of interventions designed to improve outcomes for children and young people. These interventions align with the Children

and Young People plan to ensure that “all children should have the best start in life, including good early years services and support for parents or carers. They should be supported at home, in childcare and in schools, and when they move between these places.”

Examples of our key programmes include:

- **Flying Start** which includes four core elements: these being fully funded quality childcare, parenting support, intensive health visitor support, and support for speech, language and communication.
- **Flying Start Expansion** extends high-quality childcare for two-year-olds, prioritising disadvantaged communities. This phased approach addresses workforce and capacity constraints.
- **Families First** is designed to improve outcomes for the whole family, with a focus on protecting the rights and wellbeing of babies, children and young people. The inclusive programme uses a strengths-based approach, placing an emphasis on early help, prevention, and support, to encourage happy, resilient, empowered, and independent families
- **Early Years Framework for Action** developed by Public Health Wales, The Framework clearly identifies the key components of an effective early years system and defines what good looks like in each area.
- **The Talk with Me: Speech, Language and Communication Delivery Plan**, seeks to drive improvement in the way in which children in Wales are supported to develop their SLC skills.
- **Childcare Offer** provides 30 hours a week of government-funded nursery education and childcare for eligible parents of 3- and-4-year-olds for up to 48 weeks a year.
- **Baby bundles** are being provided on a targeted geographical basis to help reduce the financial pressure families face in some of the most deprived areas of Wales.
- **Childhood vaccination programmes** aim to protect children from preventable serious diseases. increase vaccination uptake and protect children from an earlier age. The schedule is being changed from 1 January 2026 to deliver a chickenpox (varicella) vaccination programme that includes additional £2 million funding. The changes being introduced also support protecting children from an earlier age and provide an opportunity to increase vaccination uptake.
- **Healthy Weight Healthy Wales** delivery plan 2025-2027 focuses on supporting infants and children to have healthy weight and healthier lives
- **The Newborn Bloodspot Screening Programme** offers babies screening for rare but serious conditions that would benefit from early intervention, preventing serious illness or even death if not treated early.
- **The Newborn Hearing Screening Programme** identifies babies with significant hearing impairment so that support can be provided from an early stage.
- **The Healthy Child Wales Programme (HCWP)** provides the strategic framework for health boards to deliver a universal health visiting service to all families. It focuses on health promotion, developmental checks, and early identification of need. The HCWP spans from the handover of maternity services through the early years of schooling. The programme plays a crucial

role in promoting child health and well-being with the aim of reducing inequalities and improving health outcomes for children in Wales.

- **The Healthy Child Wales Programme for school-aged children** introduces a new unified model for school nursing services, ensuring planned universal health contacts for all compulsory school-aged children (5–16 years) in Wales, regardless of setting. This operating model builds on the existing Healthy Child Wales Programme, completing the age span from birth to the end of compulsory schooling and aims to provide a consistent, equitable health offer for all children and young people. The purpose of the model is to deliver a structured national programme of universal core contacts, prioritising prevention and supporting children and young people with their health and well-being throughout their school years.

All our programmes are monitored through a combination of clear outcome measures, regular data reporting, and independent evaluation/review to identify and inform areas for improvement.

This is not an exhaustive list of all our policy areas that support children and young people, and it is also important to highlight that around 95% of the MEG budget is allocated to the NHS who will set their own budgets for children's services, based on the needs of their population.

To improve performance and delivery in a sustainable way our focus will continue to be in the following areas:

- Workforce Capacity and Sustainability
- Integration of Specialist Support
- Prioritising prevention

Figures to demonstrate the progress made with the Designed to Smile programme in the most deprived wards.

Since submitting our evidence paper the D2S annual report for the academic year 2023/24 has been published. I'm pleased to report that it shows a real increase in activity, for example:

- Overall, (79% of eligible) nurseries and 531 (63% of eligible) schools provided a supervised toothbrushing programme in 2023/24. An increase of 17% on the previous year.
- 59,079 children participated in a toothbrushing programme at their nursery or primary school in 2023/24. An increase of 17% on the previous year
- There is high participation in the most deprived communities with 90% of WIMD1 nurseries and 82% of WIMD2 nurseries are engaged, alongside 72% of WIMD1 and 66% of WIMD2 primary schools — above or close to national averages.
- 167,695 toothbrushing home packs were distributed at nurseries and schools to children participating in Designed to Smile programme, to encourage toothbrushing twice a day at home
- 621 settings (75% of eligible schools) participated in the fluoride varnish element of the programme. An increase of 14%

- 40,997 children received a fluoride varnish application at their school. An increase of 15%
- Preventive interventions concentrated where need is greatest: Fluoride varnish uptake is highest in deprived schools (91% WIMD1, 88% WIMD2), with nearly 36,000 children receiving applications.
- 4,668 nursery and school staff received training from the Designed to Smile team, to deliver their toothbrushing programme.

In terms of impact, whilst it is difficult to attribute improvement in the oral health of children, the Wales epidemiological data indicates the slope index of inequality (measuring disease differences between people living in the most deprived and the least deprived areas) for dental caries prevalence has narrowed between 2008/09 and 2023/24. Our mission is to continue narrowing that gap with the support of programmes like Designed to Smile and by improving access to dentistry through dental contract reform.

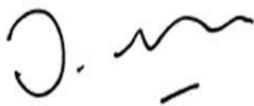
Updates on the National Board established to oversee delivery of the Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales delivery plan 2025 to 2027.

The Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales Delivery Plan for 2025-27 sets out new and clearer governance and accountability arrangements and commitments to strengthen and embed further whole system approaches at both a community and national level.

These new arrangements will enable clear accountability for progress towards our collective outcomes, supported by a new Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales framework of goals and indicators. New thematic working groups will be established, to include national and local partners, to help inform how we take forward the goals and actions in this delivery plan.

In addition to the thematic working groups, a new strategic overview group will ensure effective co-ordination, communication, monitoring and evaluation of our strategy and delivery plan goals. This will be the national board to assess progress and accountability within the system. We will use the five ways of working set out in the Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to guide our approach.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Miles AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet
dros Iechyd a Gofal
Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for
Health and Social Care



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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein Cyf/Our Ref: MA/SM/1344/25

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children and Young People's Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

3 December 2025

Dear Buffy,

In February this year, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) [published the results of its market study on infant formula](#). The focus of the market study was the lack of competition in the infant formula market and the negative impact this has on consumer choice and the affordability of infant formula products. Their final report featured a list of recommendations for governments across the UK to consider. Since the publication of this report, my officials have been working with officials in the other UK nations to develop a four nations response to the CMA's recommendations.

I am writing to confirm that the UK Government have, today, [published](#) a response to the CMA on behalf of all UK nations. As set out in the response, ministers in each nation have agreed to proceed at first with a package of non-legislative measures to address the issues with the infant formula market identified in the CMA's report. We intend to review the impact of this non-legislative package in due course and consider whether further action, including potential legislative change, is required. I will therefore write to you again, should we determine through our work that a change in approach may be necessary.

I have also sent a letter to the Chair of the Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee and the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Murphy AS/MS
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing
Y Gweinidog Iechyd Meddwl a Llesiant

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Gohebiaeth.Sarah.Murphy@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Sarah.Murphy@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.

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

Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA/LN/2730/25

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NQ

SeneddPlant@senedd.cymru

4 December 2025

Dear Buffy

Thank you for your letter of 15 August requesting further information following the Committee's reports on peer-on-peer sexual harassment and pupil absence, conducted in 2022. I am replying in relation to the request around pupil absence and have written separately in relation to the report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

You asked for information on the latest trends in relation to school absences. Overall, while attendance remains below the levels we saw before the Covid-19 pandemic, we are continuing to see improvements. Across the 2024/25 academic year our official statistics show that attendance in secondary schools rose to 89.1% from 88.0% on the previous year, overall absence fell from 12.0% to 10.9% and persistent absence dropped from 37.1% to 33.0%. Similarly, overall attendance in primary schools rose to 92.6, up from 92.1 in 2023/24, the percentage of half-day sessions missed by primary school-aged pupils decreased to 7.4% from 7.9% and persistent absence fell to 21.8% from 24.7% in 2023/24. These headline reductions are to be welcomed, but I am not complacent and continue to push for further improvement.

You will be aware that we also publish fortnightly attendance data for both Wales and our local authorities, enabling us to track progress. As we are mindful of the need to minimise burdens on schools, this regularly updated data is not quality assured as is the case for the official statistics. This means that missing data are not pursued, and schools are not expected to change existing working practices in relation to the recording of attendance data in their systems. However, data at the Wales level from this fortnightly collection has been shown to be reasonably consistent with the accredited official statistics published annually which does go through a more thorough quality assurance process.

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

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

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.

The latest [published](#) figures for this academic year detail attendance between 2 September and 21 November. They show that:

- The average attendance for this academic year to date is 91.7%, unchanged compared with the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The average attendance for this academic year to date for pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 86.3%, down from 86.4% over the same period in the 2024/25 academic year. For pupils not eligible for FSM the average attendance is 93.3%, unchanged from the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The average attendance for this academic year to date for males is 91.8%, up from 91.7% over the same period in the 2024/25 academic year. For females the average attendance is 91.6%, unchanged compared with the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.
- The average attendance for this academic year to date is lowest amongst pupils in year 11 (88.3%) and highest amongst pupils in year 3 (93.6%). Attendance amongst year 11 pupils is 0.2 percentage points higher than it was in the same period in the 2024/25 academic year.

The most common reason for absence in this academic year to date is illness, accounting for 3.5% of sessions. This was also the most common reason in the same period of the 2024/25 academic year.

We are broadly similar levels of attendance this year than last across groups of learners and I hope we will see improvement overall, across the school year.

You also asked about other policy interventions introduced since your report. We issued updated attendance [guidance](#) in October 2023. You will also be aware that following your report and the thematic review Estyn undertook in 2023 we launched our National Attendance Taskforce. The Taskforce brought together expertise from across the education and health sectors, along with colleagues from local government, youthwork, schools and more. It met for a year, discussing the issues driving learner absence and various initiatives that have been tested in schools here and in elsewhere and in my [oral statement](#) to the Senedd in December 2024 I outlined the work they undertook.

I announced in that statement that I was investing £8.8 million in work to improve engagement and attendance, spread across the 2023-24 and 2024-25 financial years. That included additional investment in the work of Family Engagement Officers; support for enrichment activities to tackle disaffection; increasing our investment in Community Focussed Schools; and additional funding for our School Holiday Enrichment Programme.

As I said at the time, Family Engagement Officers play a vital role within schools. They establish and foster good relationships with families of children and young people at the school; encourage and support parental involvement in the school and engagement in children's learning; and signpost to relevant support and services. This is increasingly important in supporting attendance and supporting learners struggling with high levels of absence. This need has not diminished in the last year, and I know from my conversations with teachers and school leaders how valued those roles are. I will be increasing this investment and seeking to do more to support their important work.

We are currently evaluating our work on Community Focussed Schools, and the evaluation report should be available next year. In addition to that you may be aware that Julie Morgan MS conducted a [review](#) of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme which further underlined the value it provides. The School Holiday Enrichment Programme celebrated its tenth anniversary this year, and has supported more children over the summer of 2025 than before. We expect the annual report to be available shortly.

With regards to the thematic report Estyn undertook, we accepted the following recommendations:

- The Welsh Government should consider how pupils living within the 3-mile radius who are not eligible for free transport could be better supported to attend school more regularly;
- The Welsh Government should consider how funding can be allocated more effectively to support schools to improve attendance;
- The Welsh Government should consider how reform of the school year might better support pupils to attend school more regularly.

We have reviewed the Learner Travel Measure and held a Learner Travel Summit, both of which are addressed in Annex A in relation to your recommendations. We have increased support for schools to tackle issues with poor attendance, including increasing our investment in Family Engagement Officers. I also made a statement to the Senedd about our proposals on reform of the school year.

We partially accepted the following recommendations:

- The Welsh Government should develop a national campaign to promote the importance of good attendance with parents, carers and pupils;
- The Welsh Government should publish core data sets for attendance twice a year, including regression analysis, residuals for persistent absenteeism and year group attendance to better support schools' own evaluation processes;
- The Welsh Government should continue to provide weekly analysis of school level attendance to provide more frequent information and improve the quality of this data;
- The Welsh Government should carry out research to identify the factors impacting on poor attendance and to discover the most effective methods of improving attendance.

I have provided information in relation to our approach to communications in Annex A, in response to the Committee's recommendation on this matter. I have also outlined already our approach to data collection and publication. Information on the research undertaken was provided in our response to the Committee in 2022, and we subsequently drew on the expertise of the National Attendance Taskforce.

I am sure you are aware that Estyn published a progress [update](#) in May 2025. We have updated our response to take account of the new information, including accepting an additional recommendation in the report related to the setting of targets on attendance: [Improving attendance in secondary schools: an update on progress | GOV.WALES](#)
We are currently considering how to implement those proposals in discussion with partners.

I hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely,

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

Update on the Recommendations made by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in November 2022

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government runs a national campaign to emphasise the positive impacts of regular school attendance. Alongside this, the Welsh Government should provide support to local authorities and schools to deliver similar, local positive campaigns about school attendance. The different campaigns should reinforce messages from the other campaigns.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept

We will be increasing communications to parents and carers addressing any concerns they still have and emphasising the importance of going to school. Community Focused Schools will play a key role in responding to this challenge. Family Engagement Officers are vital in ensuring that positive partnerships are created, and that bespoke support is offered.

Position as at October 2025

To date we have not run a national campaign in relation to school attendance, which we recognise will disappoint the Committee. This has not been a decision taken lightly, and we have worked with partners across the education sector, including children and young people, to inform our decisions around messaging and communications.

We have undertaken focus groups with learners who have had issues with attendance, looked at the communications campaigns run by local authorities on attendance and reviewed the broader evidence base. A number of factors emerged from the focus groups about issues affecting attendance. Children and young people do understand the potential impact of non-attendance on attainment, but were critical of the use of generic messaging. They wanted information that was tailored to their circumstances, and the situation in relation to their local area.

The engagement work we have done has also highlighted the importance of schools in re-engagement of learners, and engaging parents, and the approaches they use. This includes the role of broader support services, such as family engagement officers.

We recognise that messages are most effective when they are reinforced at national, local and school level, creating a consistent narrative that resonates with families. We are clear in all our communications that attendance at school is important, that regular or persistent absence impacts learners attainment, and that attendance at school is also important for supporting learners to develop critical social skills. We will continue to emphasise its importance nationally as well as developing a more specific support for schools and Local Authorities to ensure they have access to practical information to support with re-engaging learners and families and promoting the importance of school attendance.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should commission an urgent study into how the cost of living crisis is impacting on pupils' ability to attend school. This should be done within two months following the Welsh Government's response to this report and made publicly available. The review should be supported by an action plan which details what work will be done to address any of the issues highlighted in the report.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

It will be challenging to commission this within the timescales referenced. However we are already in informal discussions with an LA about a research proposal they have been developing to take an in-depth look at attendance in secondary settings, with a focus on which approaches and interventions bring the most benefit to lower income families and their engagement with education.

Position as at October 2025

As noted, the timescales set out in the recommendation were challenging and it was not possible to meet them. Having then reviewed the position, rather than commission a single study into these important issues, we have taken forward these matters through our Poverty Proofing pilot, and the work to establish a Theory of Change looking at what works in tackling the barriers poverty can place in the way of attainment.

The Poverty Proofing pilot project directly supports schools to address educational disparities, stigma and social inclusion, as well as impacting pupil wellbeing and mental health, inequality of resources and opportunities, attendance and engagement. By embedding a 'poverty proofing' approach within school clusters, this project aims to ensure that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, can access and benefit from a supportive, cost-neutral educational experience. An evaluation is underway and will report next year.

We also recognise that the issues behind the poverty attainment gap are complex and we are committed to enhancing our understanding of these factors and where we can make a difference. We are developing a Theory of Change to ensure our policy and strategy to tackle the poverty attainment gap is clear, collaborative and evidence-informed. This will help us identify where interventions can be best targeted to have maximum impact and what more can be done to ensure every learner can achieve their potential, regardless of their socio-economic background.

We have also maintained our investment in our School Essentials Grant, which goes directly to families and children to help cover the costs of school uniform, school activities such as learning a musical instrument, sports kit and other equipment for after school activities as well as classroom essentials, including pens, pencils and school bags. The School Essentials Grant has made a huge difference to many lower-income families across Wales, helping to reduce the worry surrounding the purchase of school uniform and equipment and ensure every child has what they need to learn and ensures there are no barriers to attending school.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government should ensure that decisions on learner travel are driven by the individual and specific needs of children and young people. To support local authorities in taking this approach, the Welsh Government

should ensure that local authorities have sufficient funding to ensure all children and young people have access to appropriate transport options to get them to school safely. The current review should look to prioritising a learner-first solution and should be radical in looking for innovative solutions.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle.

Much has changed since the Learner Travel Measure came into force in 2008.

Our plan remains to undertake a further review but how we take forward any work coming out of that review is likely to take time and resource.

Home to school transport now accounts for a quarter of all local authority direct spending on education – this is a growing cost.

During 2020, we undertook a review of the existing Learner Travel Measure which involved gathering initial evidence. It found weaknesses in current networks and infrastructure that make implementing an expansion of provision difficult. We found there is inconsistency in provision across all of Wales.

Rather than tweaks, a long-term sustainable plan must be found.

The government has published a White Paper, One Network, One Timetable, One Ticket, which sets out an ambitious vision for transforming bus services in Wales.

The proposed bill will offer us a chance to look a fresh at bus service delivery across Wales, including the provision of school transport.

While the distance threshold to qualify for free school transport is a key issue, there are also other significant considerations. We are now looking at how we can take forward a wider programme of work to improve operator provision, and to better align transport with other wider policy aims, such as Welsh medium provision, support ALN pupils and consider provision to Further Education establishments.

As our aims are ambitious, these reforms will take time, but it is vital that we get this right in order to support learners and our wider reform programme. In the meantime, we will continue to work with Local Authorities to encourage a consistency in approach.

Enabling more children to walk, scoot and cycle to school is a key priority for the Welsh Government.

We are funding improvements to walking and cycling routes and facilities through our Active Travel Fund and the Safe Routes in Communities Grant each year.

All local authorities must plan networks of walking and cycling routes, shown on Active Travel Network Maps. We have made it a condition that all schools must be served by active travel routes, which can be walking and/ or cycling routes.

We furthermore are encouraging local authorities across Wales to introduce School Streets, which involve road closures around schools at the start and end of the school day, in order to improve conditions for walking and cycling, improve road safety and reduce air pollution. We have offered funding to all local authorities interested in

undertaking preparatory work for the implementation of school streets schemes, if they can demonstrate that they are committed to progressing schemes.

We are working with Sustrans to provide support to schools to develop Active Travel School Plans, which aim to identify and address barriers to active travel to school, and increase the number of pupils and staff walking, scooting or cycling regularly. A set of resources and approaches is currently being piloted with the intention to begin national roll-out in 2023. This complements our long-standing Active Journeys programme and cycling and child pedestrian training.

Position as at October 2025

The Learner Travel Measure has been subject to two reviews; one completed in 2021 and a further one published in March 2024.

The 2024 [Recommendations Report](#) and accompanying [Ministerial statement](#), outlines the reasons behind the Welsh Government's decision not to make any changes to the current legislation underpinning learner travel. The report did, however, recommend a comprehensive update to the statutory guidance documents to amplify and align to changes that have been made to wider legislation since the original guidance was first produced. It also highlighted the opportunity to share innovative practice across local authorities, schools and communities to maximise the limited resources available.

The guidance has been updated to reflect findings within the two reviews that have taken place in the past five years as well as the constructive conversation we began at the Learner Travel Summit held at the beginning of May, which I attended along with the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales.

The Summit was an excellent forum to start to showcase some excellent practice taking place across Wales to support a diverse range of travel options for children and young people; and we want to harness and replicate some of this learning. We have identified a number of workstreams to take forward some of the ideas shared at the Summit and we hope to hold a follow up session before the end of this Senedd term. The workstreams focus on: updating guidance documentation, driving consistency and governance, implementing local authority interventions, improving post-16 transport planning, and delivering discounted fares for young people, as outlined in the [Learner Travel Summit Report](#)

The consultation on the revised Learner Travel Operational Guidance commenced on the 11 June and will run until 28 November.

Recommendation 4: That the Welsh Government outlines how they intend to take forward the work looking at the use of attendance data to support early interventions. In providing this detail, the Welsh Government should provide outline timeframes for the delivery of this work.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

Our Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing (March 2021) highlights the need for schools to use the range of data sources available to them when considering the wellbeing needs of their community, both in terms

of universal provision and specific targeted support for those who need it. Schools collect a range of data and intelligence, which can be used to inform and understand the well-being, both of the learners and the school staff and includes information on absence rates and on exclusions. Following publication of the Framework we are working with stakeholders to support implementation and also consider how we measure impact.

As part of our forward work programme, we will consider how absence and exclusion data can be used to help inform how schools support the wellbeing of learners to prevent persistent absence and exclusion.

Position as at October 2025

The Welsh Government is committed to working with local authorities and school leaders to support effective use of data and information to support learning and improvement, and, to facilitate this, delivering reporting tools and digital solutions to enable meaningful interrogation of data to inform action.

The Welsh Government has engaged with local authorities to understand how they and schools are making the most of their own existing management information systems functionality and where there might be limitations. We are working with local authority information management system contacts and commercial software suppliers through the Software Development Forum (SDF) to discuss the recording and collection of information from schools to support and inform education policies. We have established an Attendance and Exclusions data Sub-Group to this forum, including Welsh Government officials, local authority representatives and commercial software suppliers, to discuss and explore options on attendance and exclusions data specifically.

Through the data workstream of the National Attendance Taskforce, chaired by Professor Ann John and concluded in December 2024, significant progress has been made in improving data collection and analysis to better understand and address attendance challenges.

Since 2020 we have been publishing attendance data for Wales at least every fortnight throughout the academic year. In recent years we have significantly expanded on the range of information we publish. Data is now published at the Wales level for overall absence by school sector, sex, year group, free school meals (FSM) eligibility and ethnic background and for persistent absence (using the 10% threshold) by sex, year group and FSM. This data is freely available to all schools and local authorities to use to set their own attendance and absence patterns into a national context. We regularly seek feedback on the content and frequency of this publication and refine our outputs accordingly. The publication is available here: [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools | GOV.WALES](#)

We are currently developing plans to expand on this publication by providing individual schools with a more bespoke and regular analysis of their attendance data, building upon the current annual All Wales Core Data Sets (AWCDS). In the Spring term 2026 we will be engaging with key stakeholders to establish the content, frequency and value of such an analysis, with the aim of delivering reports during the same calendar year.

We immediately updated the annual AWCDS, which the Welsh Government produces for each maintained school and local authority, to add analyses based on the new definition of persistent absence, providing schools with analyses of persistent absence levels over time, by learners with different characteristics and compared with contextually similar schools, helping schools to understand trends and areas to inform where intervention is likely to be needed.

Looking forward, as part of our ongoing commitment to improve the use of data in education, we have committed to explore options for new and refreshed national digital tools that can support effective, equitable, and transparent data use across the school system, to build on and modernise our existing reporting systems – the AWCDs and My Local School. We are procuring a supplier to undertake a comprehensive discovery exercise to inform the next steps. This will include looking at longer term options for making more effective availability and use of the weekly attendance data to support early interventions.

Recommendation 5: That the Welsh Government monitors educational outcomes and the links with attendance rates, and publishes this data on a regular basis.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept in principle

A key principle behind the new curriculum is that all learners can progress along their own pathways to enable them to move confidently to their next steps in employment, education or training. This is deliberately and actively inclusive of disadvantaged learners, including socio-economically disadvantaged and those with ALN.

We recognise the link between attendance and educational attainment and would in principle support any policy which encourages learners to attend school.

The Government Social Research report developed by Arad Research, Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms, and the upcoming Social Finance report on the information needs of the school system, together set out how information about the school system could most constructively be used to support learner progress, school improvement, and published to describe educational outcomes at a national level. These reports will inform our approach to these issues. This will take time to develop. Publication of attendance data and qualifications data on My Local School was paused during the pandemic: these arrangements are considerations for the longer term as part of a broader information. Recommendation 5. That the Welsh Government monitors educational outcomes and the links with attendance rates and publishes this data on a regular basis. Page 44 landscape that promotes a focus on learner and teacher wellbeing, attainment at all levels, progress to next steps, and community and parental engagement.

Position as at October 2025

In December 2025 we will begin publishing an annual analysis comparing GCSE outcomes to attendance data. The data will be published at the link below:

[Examination results | GOV.WALES](#)

Recommendation 6: That the Welsh Government publishes more detailed data on the reasons for de-registration and for returning to schools after de-registration, alongside data on the support being provided to families. This data should be disaggregated by local authority and key demographics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and eligibility for free school meals.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

We are working with Data Cymru (WLGA) to improve the quality and level of data we currently capture in relation to de-registration and the key demographics of this cohort, including the reasons for de-registration.

With the expected implementation of the new EHE proposals in 2023, including the wider package of support, we plan to gather additional data to help us evaluate the impact on EHE learners.

Position as at October 2025

We currently publish an annual statistical release of pupils educated other than at school which includes details of rates of learners home educated the breakdown by age and gender across all 22 local authorities. There are a number of provisions relating to Children Not in School contained in the UK Governments Children Wellbeing and Schools Bill which will apply to Wales on enactment. As part of the work to take forward those provisions after enactment, further consideration will be given to the collation and publication of additional data fields.

We provide funding to local authorities to support home educating families. As part of the monitoring of this expenditure local authorities are required to submit annual returns to WG outlining the support they have provided.

Recommendation 7: That the Welsh Government, as part of its current review of school attendance policy and guidance, agrees and sets consistent trigger levels for intervention which apply across all local authorities in Wales.

Initial Response

Welsh Government response: Accept.

This will be actioned as part of development of revised guidance

Position as at October 2025

We amended the trigger for persistent absence from 20% to 10% to ensure earlier interventions in addressing persistent absence. Pupils are persistently absent if they have missed 10% of sessions or more of the total number of sessions in the academic year. For the threshold of 10% a primary aged pupil would be persistently absent if they missed 38 sessions or more. A secondary aged pupil would be persistently absent if they missed 30 sessions or more.

Historical data has shown that the first few weeks in September have the highest attendance of any week of the academic year and as such the year to date figures are likely to fall as the year progresses. Data on persistent absence is published following the autumn half-term break once there is sufficient data for the academic year.

Local authorities support schools on matters relating to learner engagement and attendance through their Education Welfare Service. For example, education welfare officers visit schools regularly to undertake a range of tasks, such as register consultations to discuss how they can best support the school in improving attendance and in reducing persistent absence

Agenda Item 3.14

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

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Eluned Morgan MS
First Minister

4 December 2025

Dear Eluned,

I am writing to you with both disappointment and frustration about what appears to be a member of your Cabinet avoiding committee scrutiny.

As we approach the end of this Senedd, we decided to hold final scrutiny sessions with the Cabinet Secretaries, and their Minsters whose portfolios sit firmly within our remit: Cabinet Secretary for Education; Minister for Further and Higher Education; and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care; Minister for Children and Social Services; and Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

These types of general scrutiny sessions are an important feature of committee work. They provide us with opportunities to engage appropriately across the full range of a Cabinet Secretary or Minister's portfolio, rather than the more focused sessions on specific policy, legislative or financial areas.

We are very mindful of the diary pressures on Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers. We therefore issued our invites in October, well ahead of planned sessions in February. We had confirmation from both Cabinet Secretaries, and these sessions were confirmed.

However, after our scrutiny of the Health and Social Care MEG of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget, a request was made by the Welsh Government. The request was for the Minister for Children and Social Services to attend instead of the Cabinet Secretary, saying that this is because children sits under her portfolio.

We were surprised, as while there are some individual policy areas that sit with the Minister for Children and Social Services, she is not responsible for a whole swathe of significant children's health policy which we may wish to cover during such a session. We note, during the scrutiny of the then Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill in June 2024, the Minister was clear on multiple occasions during

Senedd Cymru

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

Welsh Parliament

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

Committee scrutiny that she could not answer questions on healthcare matters that sat outside of her portfolio.

During the recent budget scrutiny session, we covered a number of areas that could only be answered by either the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, or the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing. For ease of reference, I have included in an annex all the potential areas which do not sit within the Minister for Children and Social Care's portfolio.

We considered and discussed the request as a full Committee. We were unanimous and clear that our scrutiny requires the Cabinet Secretary and both the Ministers to attend this session. A view which was communicated back to the Welsh Government.

When we were advised that there was no longer availability for the original date for the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, we were surprised. The Cabinet Secretary's attendance had previously been confirmed. We therefore offered an alternative date, hoping that we could find a date which all three could attend. We were not wedded to the date, and could be flexible about this.

We were therefore even more frustrated when we were advised that because of the forthcoming dissolution; the calls on Cabinet Secretary and Minister's diaries; the Committee's remit; and ministerial portfolios that the view remained that the Minister for Children and Social Care should come rather than all three. It was clear from this, that offering further dates would be unlikely to lead anywhere. Reading between the lines, it seemed that the Cabinet Secretary would not be available for any date we offered.

Firstly, it is a matter for a Senedd committee to decide who it wishes to scrutinise, when and why. We understand there may be occasions where a Committee wants to invite in a certain Cabinet Secretary or Minister, but the areas they wish to cover sit within another's portfolio. In those instances, it would be perfectly reasonable for the committee to be advised, and reflect on that in issuing an invite. This is not the case here, we wish to hold a general scrutiny session which covers portfolio responsibilities for all three.

Secondly, our remit encompasses education, *health* and social care of children. The Minister for Children and Social Care's remit does not cover health, which is an important area for scrutiny. She would not be in a position to answer a significant number of questions we may have. It would be unfair to both the Minister and the Committee.

Thirdly, we understand the calls on ministerial time. This is why we issued the invite months ahead of the session. The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care has not been regularly called before our Committee since taking up this post. It would only be his third appearance in this capacity, with the previous two sessions being part of Draft Budget scrutiny. We, therefore, do not believe we have made undue calls on his time.



of being a Cabinet Secretary or Minister. We note that the Cabinet Secretary for Education is coming in. When she could not do the original date offered, we were able to find an alternative slot. This is in the context that we have already taken evidence from her four times in this term alone.

When the Cabinet Secretary for Education previously requested rescheduling of other sessions, we were very flexible and agreed to moving sessions.

In relation to this request, we could also be flexible with the dates that we are offering. However, it was clear when we offered an alternative date that there was a desire to avoid coming to our committee by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, which went beyond logistics.

I hope that you would agree with us this is not acceptable. Please can you confirm that it is not your position that members of your Cabinet should be avoiding such scrutiny, and that you will reiterate to all of them the importance of respecting Committee's requests for appearances.

I would appreciate a response in time for our final Committee meeting of the term on 17 December.

I am copying in the Llywydd in her capacity as Chair of Business Committee due to the serious nature of this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Cc: Llywydd, Chair of Business Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Areas of relevant ministerial responsibility that sit outside of the Minister for Children and Social Care

Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care

As they relate to children and young people:

- Oversight of NHS Wales
- Health Protection
- Health Improvement
- Public Health
- Health inequalities
- Primary Care
- Patient experience, involvement and the citizen's voice
- Integration
- Obesity

Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

As they relate to children and young people:

- Mental health services
- Suicide prevention
- Neurodiversity
- Learning disability
- Addiction services
- Health impact of problem gambling
- Tobacco and Vaping
- Substance misuse
- Physical activity and active recreation in Wales
- Women's health

- Health improvement and wellbeing services



Agenda Item 3.15

Y Gwir Anrh/Rt Hon Eluned Morgan AS/MS
Prif Weinidog Cymru/First Minister of Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref:
FM-PO-637-2025

Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

9 December 2025

Dear Buffy,

I am writing in response to your letter of 4 December regarding attendance of the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, the Minister for Children and Social Services, and the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing at a general scrutiny session.

I acknowledge the Committee's desire to have all three Ministers present and appreciate the flexibility you have shown in seeking to accommodate ministerial diaries. I would like to assure you that the Welsh Government fully recognises the importance of Committee scrutiny and greatly values the work that all Senedd committees undertake.

Officials informed the Committee on Thursday that they would provide available dates by yesterday (Monday) with available dates for all three Ministers. As agreed, a response was sent to the Committee clerk yesterday offering 4 March as a suitable date and I hope this date will be convenient to the Committee. If this date is not suitable, we remain open to discussing alternative arrangements.

Thank you for your constructive approach on this matter.

Eluned Morgan

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

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

Gohebiaeth.Eluned.Morgan@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Eluned.Morgan@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.

Senedd Cymru

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

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

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Welsh Parliament

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

Lynne Neagle MS
Cabinet Secretary for Education

9 December 2025

Youth Work in Wales – Progress and Next Steps

Dear Lynne,

We write seeking clarity on the Welsh Government's approach to youth work in Wales, following recent concerns raised by sector representatives. As you will recall, our predecessor committee undertook an inquiry into youth work in 2016, during your time as Chair. That inquiry highlighted the importance of a sustainable model for youth delivery work and set the foundation for subsequent developments, including the recommendations published in *Time to deliver for young people in Wales* (September 2021) by the Interim Youth Work Board and the work of the Youth Work Implementation Board.

Recent correspondence from sector representatives, including Keith Towler, has raised concerns about the direction of the proposals consulted on by the Welsh Government in October 2024. In light of these concerns, we would be grateful if you could provide an update and address the following key points:

1. How does the proposed definition of youth work align with the aspirations for a sustainable model of youth work delivery as set out in "*Time to deliver for young people in Wales*"? What steps will be taken to ensure that the definition reflects the sector's vision and addresses the concerns highlighted through the consultation process?
2. While the sector welcomes the creation of a national body for youth work, concerns have been raised about a perceived top-down approach. How will the Welsh Government

ensure that the new body operates as a genuine partnership model, working collaboratively with CWYVS, WLGA and other stakeholders?

3. We note that the full consultation responses have not been published, can the Welsh Government provide details of the changes it intends to make to the final statutory framework, specifically those informed by consultation responses? Can the full consultation responses be provided to aid transparency?
4. If the new framework is to proceed largely unchanged from that outlined in last year's consultation, how will the Welsh Government address concerns raised with us that these proposals: risk creating barriers for voluntary organisations, potentially impose 'unrealistic' qualification requirements, and lack sufficient clarity and flexibility to ensure consistent implementation across Wales?
5. Given that it will be nearly ten years since the Committee's original inquiry by the end of this Senedd term, what is the timeline for implementing this very important next phase of youth work policy? How will progress be monitored and reported to ensure accountability?

Youth work plays a vital role in supporting children and young people across Wales and we are keen to ensure that the Welsh Government's approach reflects the sector's expertise and builds on the foundations and collaborative approach laid over the past decade.

We look forward to your response by 22 January.



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



James Owen

Chief Executive, Medr

10 December 2025

Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026-27

Dear James,

Since we took oral evidence from you during our scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget, it has come to the attention of some Members that some FE institutions may have more students than places. We are understandably concerned about this.

Both the Cabinet Secretary for Education and the Minister for Further and Higher Education highlighted the potential impact of the increasing popularity of colleges in the current financial climate. The Minister for Further and Higher Education noted that she had met with you, and that you had highlighted that this could become an "additional pressure for the sector." Both the Cabinet Secretary and Minister emphasised that they did not want to see learners on waiting lists for college places.¹

In this context, we would like some further information about waiting lists for student places in colleges. We would appreciate if you could respond to the following questions:

1. What is the extent of colleges using waiting lists for over-subscribed courses?
2. Do you know how many students across Wales are on a waiting list for a college place. If so, do you have information on the geographical breakdown of these waiting lists and what courses are oversubscribed?

¹ CYPE Committee, 27 November, Record of Proceedings, paragraphs 214 and 216

3. What actions are Medr taking to reduce numbers waiting for a place, and ultimately ensure that no student is on waiting list for a college place?

I am copying in the Cabinet Secretary for Education, the Minister for Further and Higher Education and Colegau Cymru.

We would appreciate a response by 7 January.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

CC: Cabinet Secretary for Education

Minister for Further and Higher Education

ColegauCymru

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Document is Restricted