

Agenda – Children, Young People, and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 3 Senedd and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 4 February 2026	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 General scrutiny session with the Welsh Government – Education

09.30 – 11.00

(Pages 1 – 52)

Lynne Neagle MS, Cabinet Secretary for Education

Vikki Howells MS, Minister for Further and Higher Education

Georgina Harhoff, Director of Education, Welsh Government

Nicola Edwards, Deputy Director, Equity in Education Division, Welsh Government

Hannah Wharf, Deputy Director, Support for Learners Division, Welsh Government

Ruth Meadows, Director of Tertiary Education, Welsh Government



Attached Documents:

Research brief

Welsh Government Evidence Paper

3 Papers to note

11.00

3.1 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 53 – 55)

Attached Documents:

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

3.2 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 56 – 72)

Attached Documents:

Response from the Welsh Government to the Committee's report

3.3 Routes into post-16 education and training

(Pages 73 – 85)

Attached Documents:

Response from Medr to the Committee's report

3.4 Forward work programme

(Pages 86 – 93)

Attached Documents:

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

3.5 Welsh Government draft Budget 2026–27

(Pages 94 – 113)

Attached Documents:

Response from the Welsh Government to the Committee's report

3.6 P–06–1540 Remove The Manipulative Funding System Forcing Students To Do Welsh Baccalaureate

(Pages 114 – 115)

Attached Documents:

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

3.7 P–06–1532 Early Expert Input and Safeguarding Reform for Children with Additional Learning Needs in Wales

(Page 116)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Chair of the Petitions 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 General scrutiny session with the Welsh Government – consideration of the evidence

11.00 – 11.15

Break

11.15 – 11.25

6 Implementation of education reforms – consideration of the draft letter

11.25 – 12.00

(Pages 117 – 127)

Attached Documents:

Draft letter

ALN Toolkit for Parents: Advisory Group Review

7 Forward work programme – discussion on Committee's Legacy work

12.00 – 12.30

(Pages 128 – 140)

Attached Documents:

Key Issues

Document is Restricted

Children, Young People & Education Committee



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

January 2026

September 2025 marked a pivotal moment for education in Wales, as the first cohort of pupils began Year 10 under the reformed Curriculum for Wales, embarking on a journey towards new Made for Wales qualifications. This milestone reflects our ongoing commitment to nurturing an education system where every child and young person can thrive. Central to this vision is ensuring that learners feel supported, safe, and fully engaged and equipped with the skills and confidence to progress into further education and employment.

Our determination to raise standards and close the poverty attainment gap is unwavering. Through targeted policy initiatives and dedicated funding streams, we are working to support children, young people, and their families, enabling all learners to reach their full potential. The decisions underpinning the Draft Budget for 2026–27 are guided by our core government and education priorities, with inflationary uplifts carefully directed to maximise the impact of every resource.

By embracing a social partnership approach, we are strengthening the teaching profession, ensuring that pay, terms, and conditions are tailored to the unique needs of educators in Wales. Furthermore, by increasing participation across all post-16 education and training pathways, we are investing in a higher-skilled workforce that will drive productivity and foster broader economic and social wellbeing.

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1. Curriculum, standards & attainment

In September 2025, the Curriculum for Wales marked another significant milestone as the first pupils taught under our reformed curriculum began Year 10, progressing towards new Made for Wales qualifications.

Evaluation of Progress

The formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales reveals that implementation is progressing well across maintained schools, with strong engagement from practitioners, learners, and families. Schools are embedding the curriculum's four purposes and pedagogical principles into their planning, leading to more authentic, learner-centred experiences and improved monitoring of progression. There is notable evidence of increased engagement from learners and parents, with curriculum flexibility supporting equity and diverse needs. Health and well-being are central, fostering good mental health and resilience, while leaders and practitioners are gaining confidence in curriculum design.

Collaboration within schools and communities is strengthening, and curriculum reform is acting as a catalyst for broader school improvement.

To ensure ongoing improvement, the Welsh Government is committed to robust monitoring through multiple approaches, including formative evaluation, personalised assessments, and international benchmarking via PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS. National-level data from personalised assessments indicate encouraging progress in reading and numeracy, with English reading showing particular improvement across all year groups compared to 2022/23. The Education Improvement Team and Curriculum Policy group continue to work closely with local authorities and teaching professionals, ensuring that feedback from the sector shapes national support and direction.

In December 2025 three reports were published as part of the ongoing Formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales:

Formative evaluation of the Curriculum for Wales: phase 1 synthesis report	https://www.gov.wales/formative-evaluation-curriculum-wales-phase-1-synthesis-report
Formative evaluation of Curriculum for Wales: survey of senior leaders and practitioners	https://www.gov.wales/formative-evaluation-curriculum-wales-survey-senior-leaders-and-practitioners
Formative evaluation of Curriculum for Wales: survey of learners and their parents and carers	https://www.gov.wales/formative-evaluation-curriculum-wales-survey-learners-and-their-parents-and-carers

Professional Learning through the Grant Support Programme

The Curriculum for Wales grant support programme is a revenue grant scheme designed for education stakeholder organisations, aiming to help realise the Curriculum for Wales for all learners aged 3 to 16 in maintained schools. Offering awards of up to three years, the programme funds a variety of activities and interventions that enhance schools' and settings' capacity to support learner progress, with a long-term focus on our priorities, particularly: curriculum design, literacy, mathematics and numeracy. Grant awards now provide direct support to schools, including professional learning in critical areas such as literacy, numeracy, and curriculum design.

Oversight of these grants is set to formally transfer to Dysgu, the new professional learning and leadership body, from 1 April, with seconded professional advisors for literacy and numeracy already collaborating closely with grant-funded organisations and Dysgu to ensure a seamless transition and coherence in this nationally available support.

Literacy and Numeracy as enablers for raising standards

Literacy and numeracy are essential for accessing the wider curriculum, so we are investing in professional learning and targeted grants to raise standards and support all learners, including those who struggle. National support includes detailed progression resources, age-related expectations, and a strong focus on systematic phonics teaching, with guidance and case studies available on Hwb.

Collaboration with Estyn and local authorities ensures these resources are practical and effective, while the Literacy Expert Panel is developing evidence-based principles to guide teaching. We are also working with Dysgu and Adnodd to ensure high-quality professional learning and resources and reviewing key frameworks with practitioners and experts to strengthen cross-curricular skills.

Qualifications

Qualifications Wales has reformed 14-16 qualifications to align with the curriculum and support learners' future opportunities, with new GCSEs introduced and more timely information for schools. Welsh Government funding enables WJEC to provide tailored professional learning and resources for teachers, with further support planned for the next wave of GCSEs.

2. Wellbeing, Safeguarding & Inclusion

The physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of children and young people is central to our education system and recent reforms. We are committed to helping all learners thrive and reach their potential by ensuring they feel supported, safe, and ready to learn and prepare them for further education and employment. To support this, we are investing £13.6 million in our Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing in this financial year. In 2026-27 that will be increasing to £14.2 million, with £5.3 million of that directed to Local Health Boards to support the CAMHS in-reach model. We continue to advance the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan, the LGBTQ+ Action Plan, and the Social Model of Disability. Recognising that some learners face additional barriers, we have prioritised investment in equity of access to learning throughout this Senedd term.

We have completed the transition to our Additional Learning Needs system, providing over £150 million in revenue to local authorities and schools since 2020, and more than £170 million in capital funding to improve facilities and infrastructure. Further investment through the Local Authority Education Grant includes nearly £128 million annually in the Pupil Development Grant and almost £18 million for community-focused support and family engagement. These efforts have led to improvements such as increased school attendance, rising to 91.1% in 2024-25, though persistent absence remains a challenge. We continue to invest in evidence-based interventions to improve behaviour, building on the success of the National Behaviour Summit in May 2025

Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

We continue to prioritise support for local authorities, schools, and partners to meet the needs of both learners and the education workforce, recognising that effective learning requires everyone to be engaged and prepared. Building on our Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing Framework and statutory guidance published in March 2021, funding has increased to over £13 million this year from Education and Health Budgets.

This investment has expanded counselling services, trained staff on wellbeing, delivered universal and targeted interventions, and developed CAMHS school in-reach with dedicated mental health practitioners. Working with Public Health Wales, schools assess and plan for their wellbeing needs, and as of December 2025, 93% of schools are actively action planning, with support ongoing for those yet to complete their wellbeing plans

Tackling the Poverty Attainment Gap

The Welsh Government is focused on raising attainment for all learners and closing the poverty attainment gap. To address this, £128 million was provided through the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) in 2025-26, supporting various cohorts, and a policy review is underway to improve its effectiveness. Additional initiatives include the School Essentials Grant, the Poverty Proofing pilot, the Attainment Champions pilot, and the Food and Fun holiday programme, all aimed at supporting disadvantaged learners and their families.

Equalities & Human Rights

We recognise that education leaders and practitioners need some support to help them understand the best way to support learners and help them to feel safe and included in the school environment. In autumn 2025 the Welsh Government hosted a series of four webinars for practitioners which focussed on approaches to embed equality in schools.

Anti-racism in education

The Welsh Government aims to create an anti-racist Wales by 2030, with its Action Plan calling for zero tolerance of racial inequality. Since its launch, progress includes mandatory teaching of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic histories in schools, expanded professional learning, increased ethnic minority representation in teaching, and all Welsh universities achieving the Advance HE Race Equality Charter. Funding supports local authorities and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Services to help children facing barriers to education, with £11 million allocated annually since 2021.

Food in schools

Wales' food-in-schools programme has quickly improved children's wellbeing and learning, especially for those in poverty, by providing Universal Primary Free School Meals. Since launch, 174,000 pupils have become eligible and 57 million meals have been served. With increased funding, updated Healthy Eating Regulations, and targeted support in secondary schools, over two-thirds of Welsh learners now receive a free meal daily. Combined with free breakfasts and school milk, Wales offers the most generous school food provision in the UK.

Safeguarding in Education

Following the "Our Bravery Brought Justice Child Practice Review", immediate steps are being taken to strengthen safeguarding in education, including updating RSE teaching and ensuring consistent application of safeguarding frameworks. A review of safeguarding procedures is underway to assess their effectiveness.

For online safety, resources and guidance on Hwb are regularly updated, with expert input and collaboration with Ofcom and other partners. Guidance covers issues like sextortion, AI-generated abuse, social media risks, and generative AI, while schools receive training and support to respond to cyber incidents and promote digital resilience. Young people's views are included through the Keeping Safe Online Youth Group.

Additional Learning Needs (ALN): Progress and Priorities

The transition to the ALN system in Wales has now completed, with over 32,000 Individual Development Plans in place and an ALNCo in every school. Funding for ALN has increased significantly since 2020, and Estyn reports early signs of improvements in ALN provision.

Recent reviews have found strong support for the principles of the reforms, especially inclusion and person-centred planning. However, they also highlight areas where further improvement is required.

A key finding was the inconsistent delivery of the ALN system across Wales, particularly in how the definitions of ALN and additional learning provision (ALP) are interpreted and applied. There also continue to be significant financial and workload pressures, despite substantial investment since 2020, which affect the sustainability and consistency of provision.

In response, five priority areas have been identified

- Provide clarity to the education sector on how to support children and young people with ALN.
- Improve national consistency in delivering the ALN system.
- Ensure children, young people and their families have the right information and support.
- Improve multiagency integration and collaboration to meet the health, social care and educational needs of children and young people with ALN
- Explore a longer-term vision for an inclusive education system.

Action has already been taken on these priorities, driven by a new national delivery board, including:

- Developing supporting guidance to provide clarity on the legislative framework,
- Publication of a new parent's toolkit,
- Commissioning a review of advocacy services,
- A quinquennial review of Welsh language provision,
- Engagement event with Regional Partnership Boards to strengthen integration between health and education to meet the needs of learners,

Attendance

Regular attendance at, and engagement, with education and learning is a critical to achieving our aspiration that every child in Wales has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

In this context, I am pleased that overall attendance in maintained schools in Wales rose to 91.1% in the 2024-25 academic year, up from 90.5% in 2023-24. year. Similarly:

- the percentage of half-day sessions missed by pupils in primary and secondary schools having decreased to 8.9% in 2024/25, from 9.5% the previous year;
- the number of pupils that were persistently absent fell from 30.4% to 27.0% in 2024/25, which shows the progress schools are making; and
- the number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) who missed half-day sessions decreased to 14.6% in 2024/25.

In spite of this, we remain concerned about attendance for the cohort of learners who are eligible for Free School Meals, which is still some way below that for their peers. Our focus remains on removing barriers so every child can attend regularly and succeed.

However, we also have to recognise that the pandemic had a huge impact on both school attendance and attitudes towards learning. For some families, the idea of regular school attendance has shifted. There is now a greater expectation of flexibility - whether that's remote learning, hybrid models, or home-based education.

It has, therefore, taken a huge effort by our schools, the workforce and families to start to turn this around and to show a year-on-year improvement. I want to commend them for their ongoing commitment and hard work.

It is important then, that we continue to focus on addressing the barriers that prevent children from attending school regularly to ensure every child has the best possible chance to succeed.

To support this, I have committed £7m funding this year to help children re-engage with school. Under this funding package I have provided:

- An extra £3m supporting the work of Family Engagement Officers;
- £2m supporting the provision of enrichment activities;
- £1 million to further embed the role of Community Focussed Schools; and
- £1 million to support our Food and Fun, School Holiday Enrichment Programme.

We are also currently reviewing the school attendance codes to get a more robust understanding of the reasons behind non-attendance, with a consultation to start shortly.

3. School organisation, Leadership & Improvement

The third edition of the School Organisation Code and which is due to come into force in spring, updates statutory guidance for schools in Wales. This edition incorporates recent legislative changes, including Welsh Language Standards, Cymraeg 2050: Welsh Language Strategy, Medr's role in organising school sixth forms, and the ALN and Curriculum Acts. Alongside this, a review of school governing bodies is underway, supported by a sector reference group, to assess the appropriateness of governors' roles and responsibilities, with findings due to be reported to Ministers in the summer.

In January 2026, new school improvement guidance was published to clarify expectations for all stakeholders, following the 'Review of roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and delivery of school improvement arrangements'. This guidance is grounded in policy objectives agreed through the School Improvement Partnership Programme and aims to deliver the review's recommendations.

Five core principles underpin the new school improvement arrangements:

- 1. Collective Responsibility:** Raising standards for all learners is a shared endeavour. Schools remain accountable for their own learners but are also expected to support progress across the wider education system, collaborating with other schools and local authorities (LAs) to promote high expectations and equity.
- 2. External Perspectives:** Schools should welcome peer collaboration and external challenge to improve learning. Trusted external input strengthens self-evaluation, professional learning, and openness across the system.
- 3. Focus on Learning:** Sustainable improvement comes from long-term collaboration. Schools and LAs work together to tackle barriers early and develop shared solutions tailored to local needs.
- 4. Building Capacity:** Expertise is developed and shared across sectors—primary, secondary, special schools, PRUs, and LAs—to build a resilient, inclusive education system that meets diverse learner needs.
- 5. Clarity and Coherence:** All partners understand their roles. Welsh Government and national bodies set clear expectations and support improvement and professional learning, while schools and LAs align local efforts with national priorities.

The school improvement model outlined in the guidance provides clarity on roles and responsibilities. Schools are expected to lead their own self-evaluation and improvement planning in an open, iterative way, supported by external perspectives from other schools and the LA. Collaboration is encouraged both vertically (across age ranges) and horizontally (between similar schools), providing additional capacity and expertise for sustainable improvement. School development plans (SDPs) should capture ongoing strategic plans, priorities, and professional learning, with improvement also planned across collaborative partnerships.

Local authorities should use the collaborative improvement model to gain an authentic understanding of local needs, assess schools' capacity for improvement, broker bespoke support, and build a resilient learning system. LAs are encouraged to work together to

refine self-evaluation processes, share improvement priorities, and school-based capacity, using intelligence from their work with schools and other LAs to inform strategic planning.

Finally, the Welsh Government has established a new professional learning and leadership body to deliver consistent support for national priority areas, enhancing system-wide improvement. Further evidence and details can be found in the Welsh Government Evidence Paper for the Children, Young People and Education Committee on school improvement and learner attainment

4. Funding & Investment in Education

Core funding for schools in Wales is primarily provided through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) as part of the Local Government Settlement, with local authorities determining the allocation to education and schools. For 2026-27, the Welsh Government's final settlement published on 20 January, will deliver £6.6 billion from the RSG and Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) to support key services, including schools- an average increase of 4.5% on a like-for-like basis, with all local authorities receiving increases above 4%. In addition to core funding, schools benefit from Welsh Government grants, mainly through the Education MEG.

The Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) remains the main grant mechanism for pre-16 education, with £418.3 million invested in 2026-27 - an increase of over 4% from the previous year, following a 5.5% rise in 2025-26. Funding decisions in the Draft Budget for 2026-27 are shaped by government and education priorities, with inflationary uplifts targeted to maximise resources for these aims.

Within the Education MEG, the Welsh Government has prioritised additional funding to support key areas. In the draft budget 2026-27, an extra £5 million is allocated through the LAEG to improve delivery of Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision, building on last year's £10 million uplift and taking total ALN funding through the LAEG reform strand to £37 million in 2026-27. A further £4.1 million via Medr will support learners with ALN in further education colleges. The Final Budget 2026-27 sees an additional £4.2m allocated for ALN (through the ALN BEL) to further support schools, settings and local authorities. For learners over 16 requiring access to independent specialist colleges, an additional £3 million is provided, bringing the post-16 specialist placements budget to £19.9 million in 2026-27.

Funding through the School Standards, Equity, Reform, and Cymraeg 2050 strands of the LAEG is also prioritised, with £418.3 million invested in 2026-27. This includes an extra £8.9 million (a 5.3% increase) for the School Standards strand, supporting foundation learning, teachers, and support staff, and taking total school standards funding to over £178 million. The Equity strand receives an additional £2.5 million to support attendance and interventions tackling disaffection, family engagement, and learner support, building on last year's £7 million increase. This includes £1 million for Family Engagement Officers, £1 million for enrichment activities, and £0.5 million for embedding Community Focused School approaches.

Further investment includes £2 million for the Curriculum for Wales grant support programme and personalised assessments, building on the £10 million invested from 2025-26 to support literacy and numeracy. The Hwb national programme receives an extra £0.3 million in 2026-27 for essential cloud support services, following a £1.6 million investment in 2025-26, ensuring access to digital tools for all learners and practitioners in maintained schools.

For tertiary education, the draft budget allocated an additional £21.5 million through Medr in 2026-27 (excluding the Estyn transfer), supporting ALN, pay parity in FE colleges and sixth forms, Initial Teacher Education placements, Financial Contingency Funds for FE colleges, and expansion of the junior apprenticeship programme. In the Final Budget 2026-27, a further £5m is being made available to support the increase in participation of learners in further education which is managed by Medr.

Finally, an extra £7.1 million in capital funding was allocated in the Draft Budget 2026-27 to support the educational estate, providing environments that encourage higher attendance and attainment and strengthen communities across Wales. In the Final Budget 2026-27, a further £20m capital funding is allocated to the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme to support school and college buildings.

Curriculum

This year, we have invested comprehensively in this vision, with a £44 million support package that includes £20 million specifically directed to literacy and numeracy over the next 3 years - the essential foundations for all learning. This is in addition to an extra £2.5 million this year to aid local authorities to support these crucial gateway skills. The grant package includes:

- £6.6 million for Maths and numeracy
- £13.2 million for literacy, including support for Welsh-medium
- £2 million for curriculum design
- £1.6 million for international languages
- £4.2 million for Relationships and Sexuality Education
- £1.8 million for science
- £1.4 million for digital skills and computer science
- £12 million for the National Music Service
- £780k to support non-maintained nursery settings to realise the curriculum.

5. Teacher workforce: Recruitment & Development

The forthcoming Strategic Education Workforce Plan, has been developed in partnership with local authorities / governors as employers, union partners and school staff, parents / carers, and learners, and informed by the Committee's inquiry into Teacher Recruitment and Retention. It will set out our vision for supporting the school workforce in four key areas: supporting our workforce to deliver quality teaching and learning to improve outcomes for learners; addressing workload issues, building on the work of the Strategic Workload Coordination Group; responding to new challenges for the school workforce and ensuring access to support through a specialist workforce; and ensuring that teaching, leadership and supporting teaching remains an attractive career pathway. The well-being of staff is at the heart of the Plan, underpinned by our whole-school approach.

Wales provides high-quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE), including Salaried and Part-time PGCE routes. Recent improvements include expanding the range of secondary subjects available; doubling the salary contribution grant for Welsh medium secondary and opening access to primary schools and secondary schools within a transitional language category; and new programmes for school-based employees and for specialising in neurodiversity. We offer targeted incentives to attract entrants for priority subjects, for the Welsh-medium sector (as part of a range of measures pursuing our Cymraeg 2025 ambitions) and from ethnic minorities; these are also the focus of our national recruitment campaign Teaching Wales/Addysgu Cymru. Initial teacher education recruitment into the primary sector continues to be buoyant. Recruitment into secondary remains very challenging. Other nations are encountering similar problems.

Supporting teachers' professional learning (PL) from the beginning to the end of their career is critical to fostering high-quality teaching. All newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are now supported during their first year of teaching with a funded mentor and a PL programme. Dysgu, the new PL and leadership body, will review this support as part of developing an early career programme, alongside its wider work on national priorities. Our National Masters in Education and National Doctorate in Education provide an accredited academic pathway. We are consulting on the 6 INSET days currently offered, and continuing to provide the professional learning grant, worth £13.5m per annum.

By taking a social partnership approach, we support the teaching profession by ensuring their pay, terms and conditions are designed to best suit the profession here in Wales and currently provide higher salaries and allowances for both new and more experienced teachers than in England. We have introduced key improvements such as the reintroduction of pay portability and removal of performance-based pay progression; removal of the strict pro-rata principle for TLR allowances and the application process to move from the main to upper pay scale. We are working on a single pay scale for classroom teachers and on moving ALN co-ordinators to the leadership group pay scale.

6. Tertiary Education Participation and Sustainability

We recognise the challenges the sector is currently facing and are taking several actions to address these challenges. The Minister for Further and Higher Education has established a **Ministerial Advisory Group** and launched a **Call for Submissions** to bring together a robust evidence base for tertiary education policy development.

An evidence paper has been published, with an invitation for stakeholders to respond to questions around five key challenges facing the sector:

1. Participation and equality of opportunity
2. Demographic change and lifelong learning
3. Competition and collaboration
4. Financial sustainability
5. Delivering for the economy of the future

The Minister will be engaging directly with sector representatives and learners during the call for submissions.

Participation and equality of opportunity

Increasing participation across all post-16 education and training pathways is fundamental to developing a higher-skilled workforce, supporting productivity and wider economic and social wellbeing. Compared to the rest of the UK, Wales has a higher estimated share of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) than other UK nations, and lower qualification levels among younger adults in the workforce.

However, further education (FE) demand is growing rapidly with the proportion of learners progressing to FE colleges at age 16 increasing from 48% in 2017/18 to 56% in 2024/25. School sixth forms are seeing sustained declines in learner numbers. There are also changing trends in pathways through post-16 education and training, with recent growth in level 2 and below vocational courses and a relative decline in the proportion of learners undertaking level 3 courses, particularly AS and A level. In higher education we have participation rates lower than the rest of the UK at age 18, but a greater proportion of students studying part-time in Wales compared to England, and at a later age.

We have increased the household income threshold for Education Maintenance Allowance eligibility to support learners to continue their education. For learners progressing to HE, we continue to provide the most generous living cost support for students in the UK with the highest levels of non-repayable grant support provided to those most in need.

The Welsh Government has recently responded to the recommendations from the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report on 'Routes into Post-16 Education and Training'. Expanding access to a full range of vocational, technical and academic pathways will raise overall qualification levels across the population, improving skills and life outcomes.

Taith, our internationally recognised international learning exchange programme, has delivered significant impact since its launch with over 11,500 mobilities having now taken

place to over 100 countries and territories. Taith places a strong emphasis on inclusion. Around 46% of outbound learners are from underrepresented groups, including individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities or additional learning needs. This ensures that opportunities are accessible to those who can benefit most, reflecting our commitment to fairness and equality of opportunity.

We have continued work to strengthen the Youth Engagement Progression Framework, supporting young people to fulfil their potential by helping them engage in education, employment or training and preventing them from becoming homeless. As well as our ongoing investment in local authority and voluntary sector youth work provision, a cross-sector workforce development programme has been expanded to ensure practitioners continue to have the skills and expertise to serve the needs of young people. This, alongside work to develop a statutory framework for youth work and the development of a national body for youth work, are all aimed at helping achieve a sustainable delivery model for youth work and deliver a rich and diverse youth work offer for young people.

The Junior Apprenticeship programme is a NEET intervention targeted at learners aged 14 to 16 who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from mainstream education. The programme is highly valued by learners and has a positive impact on their lives, providing them with the opportunity to study for a range of vocational courses in college.

While the programme is now offered in seven colleges across Wales, we want more learners to benefit. We are working with Medr and our FEI partners to make Junior Apprenticeships available to more learners. Our budget for 2026/27 includes £1m for the programme, more than double the programme's budget in 2024/25.

It is important to note that Junior Apprenticeships are not the only intervention targeted at these learners, with many colleges also offering a range of part-time provision for learners aged 14 to 16.

Reaching Wider is a pan-Wales collaborative programme with universities, colleges and schools in three regions, working together to improve social mobility by widening access to all forms of higher education (HE). The combined £2m (programme) + £500k (mentoring) investment directly addresses the participation barriers. Reaching Wider's mission is that every child, young person and adult should have the opportunity to consider HE, regardless of their background. Many learners, especially those from under-represented communities, may feel that university is out of reach due to financial concerns, lack of family experience of HE, or limited exposure to the pathways available and Reaching Wider is there to support these learners

Reaching Wider provides guidance and information, helping learners explore all available pathways, helping learners at key transition points such as primary to secondary, secondary to FE, FE to HE, as well as developing and enhancing skills, and encouraging learners to explore future careers and opportunities.

The Reaching Wider programme aims to work with the same under-represented learners throughout their journey from school to HE. Statistics for engagement therefore include a

combination of young people who may have participated in a few activities alongside others with whom have engaged over a longer period. A snapshot of all-Wales Reaching Wider delivery for 2023-24 demonstrates the large volume of people who benefit from our programme.

- 17,570 children, young people & adults took part in Reaching Wider activities of which over nearly 16,000 were children and young people.
- Over 90,000 hours of engagement with children and young people
- 70% of people with which we engaged fell into the Reaching Wider eligibility criteria
- 40% of participants received over 6 hours engagement.

The delivery model being evaluated in 2025-26 to improve outcomes and ensure provision takes account of transition to and through tertiary provision

Demographic change and lifelong learning

We are proud that part-time provision has been a significant success in Wales, with substantial increases in the numbers of part-time higher education students since 2018, and a far greater proportion of students in Wales studying part-time compared to England. Welsh Government has increased the part-time fee loan cap by £250 for the 2026/27 academic year.

We have increased the Welsh Government Learning Grant, which supports learners aged 19 and over with the cost of study in further education. This means that from September 2025, the amount learners can receive has increased from a maximum of £1,500 to £1,919 to help them with the cost of studying a course up to and including Level 3.

This additional support will further help those from the lowest income households to reduce the financial barrier associated with study and demonstrates my continued commitment to ensuring learners at every stage of their lives can access education.

A review of the WGLG will be published this year and Welsh Government will consider its recommendations.

Competition and collaboration

The Minister for Further and Higher Education has established a Ministerial Advisory Group made up of representatives from across the tertiary education and research sector. Its purpose is to focus on the strategic priorities for tertiary education, particularly increasing collaboration across the sector, participation rates and stabilising the current financial challenges.

The Minister for Further and Higher Education tasked Medr and officials with working with the Competition and Markets Authority on potential ways forward to support collaboration between higher education providers. Welsh Government is also working closely with Medr on this in the context of their strategic duty to promote collaboration and coherence in the tertiary sector.

The Minister also commissioned Medr to undertake a mapping exercise looking at subject provision across Wales. This is due to be published shortly, and will provide valuable insight into how Welsh Government, universities and Medr can work together to ensure priority subjects are available across Wales, and form part of the evidence base for future work.

Financial sustainability

Financial pressures in the further education sector are increasing, due to increased staff and non-staff costs. Welsh Government core funding enabled Medr to increase its initial funding allocations for FE colleges by £13.7m this year, and to allocate a further £21.1m in January, to recognise further increases in learner participation – that’s £34m extra for colleges in total. This will mean a total increase in core funding for the FE sector this academic year of 8.5%. The unit-rate for sixth-form funding has also increased at the same rate as colleges in recent years to meet increased costs of teacher pay.

We have also asked Medr to retain pay parity between school sixth-form and FE teachers, and provided an uplift in funding towards the Financial Contingency Fund, and the costs associated with supporting learners with Additional Learning Needs, within the budget for 2026/27.

Welsh universities also face significant financial challenges, with most institutions implementing cost-saving measures and job cuts to mitigate the impact of rising costs, increased competition for domestic students, a sharp decline in international enrolments and the ongoing impact of the loss of EU funding. Much of this is a UK-wide challenge and universities across the UK are facing similar challenges.

We provided an additional £28.5 million in grant support in 2024/25, bringing total HE grant funding to over £200 million. £18.5 million of this was capital investment, directed toward projects aimed at reducing operating costs and improving facilities, with long-term savings expected from energy efficiency and reduced maintenance.

Welsh Government has announced an increase in the tuition fee cap to £9,790 in 2026/27, in line with England, which will generate an estimated £19 million in additional revenue for the sector. We also announced an increase the part-time tuition fee loan by £250.

Welsh Government opted out of the UK Government’s proposed International Student Fee Levy, which would have added increased financial pressure to Welsh universities. Here in Wales, we are not seeking to moderate overseas student demand in this way—we continue to welcome international students and deeply value the contributions they make.

Delivering for the economy of the future

We recognise that the tertiary sector makes a vital contribution to delivering for our future economy through providing skills and qualifications for the future workforce. Welsh Government will publish a Prospectus for the Strategic Direction for Vocational Education and Training (VET) for Wales prior to the pre-election period. This will ensure our VET system plays a central role in growing the economy by equipping learners with the skills

demanded by a rapidly evolving labour market. The Prospectus will complement the call for submissions and form a key subset of the wider review.

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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

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Welsh Government

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26 January 2026

Dear Buffy

Thank you for your letter of 9 December regarding our work to take forward the recommendations made by the Interim Youth Work Board in their final report – “Time to deliver for young people in Wales”. I am proud of our ongoing support for the youth work sector as well as the progress made to date in response to the Interim Board’s recommendations aimed at developing a sustainable delivery model for youth work in Wales. I would like to acknowledge the constructive and valuable engagement that representatives across the youth work sector continue to provide as we take this work forward.

I will address the key points raised in your letter in sequence.

- 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?**

Our draft statutory framework for youth work published for consultation in autumn 2024 included a definition of youth work. The purpose of this definition was to ensure clarity and consistency as part of the duty that we propose to place on all local authorities to secure the delivery of youth work – either directly through their own local authority-led provision, or through their work with partners. It is vital that a definition of this kind distinguishes youth work from other activities for young people. Without a clear and robust definition, we cannot hold local authorities accountable for the provision of a youth work service. As set out in the summary of responses to our consultation, there were a range of views on the proposed definition. Careful work has been undertaken since that point to look in detail at this aspect of the framework to consider how best to achieve our aims as well as address the concerns

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

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

raised. This has included detailed engagement with representatives from the voluntary sector, including CWVYS.

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 CWVYS, WLGA and other stakeholders?

I am eager to ensure this national body elevates youth work, supports and enables collaboration, innovation and excellence across the youth work sector and between youth work and other partners, and ultimately enhances the youth work offer for young people across Wales. I am also eager to ensure that it does not stifle or cut across the way in which youth work is so adept at responding to the needs of young people. However, I would like to emphasise that no decision has yet been made on the role and remit of a national body for youth work in Wales. A delivery board which includes representatives from CWVYS, WLGA and other key partners has been established to work in collaboration with Welsh Government to shape this national body as well as informing how others across the sector feed into its development and implementation. This delivery board has already met twice, and a key focus for its discussions to date has included how to engage with young people and the youth work sector more widely. The Terms of Reference and minutes from the first meeting will be published shortly on the Welsh Government's website. I look forward to hearing more about their work and advice to help drive this work forward.

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?

All consultation responses have been carefully considered as part of our work to refine the statutory framework for youth work. The final phases of this work will conclude over the weeks ahead, with the final framework due for publication by April 2026. Further details on how consultation responses have informed the final framework will be provided at that point. I have also asked my officials to arrange for all consultation responses to be made available online, to help address the concerns raised in your letter regarding the transparency of this phase of the work.

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?

As noted above, great care has been taken to ensure we look in detail at the responses received to our consultation on a draft statutory framework for youth work. The refined framework will take account of these responses, as well as the careful and constructive engagement with stakeholders undertaken over recent months. Further support is also being put in place to help address the barriers identified by voluntary organisations, including focused action to support workforce capacity and expertise within voluntary organisations. Once again, I would like to acknowledge the positive and constructive discussions with partners, including CWVYS, which have enabled us to work together to explore how the framework is centred around a collaborative approach to the planning and delivery of youth work.

- 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?**

As noted in my statement on 1 December, the final statutory framework is due to be published by April 2026, with the first five-year youth work strategic plans commencing in April 2027. Detailed work is underway in partnership with the National Body for Youth Work Delivery Board to develop a comprehensive timeline for the establishment of that organisation.

Once again, I would like to thank all those who have engaged in this important work.

Yours sincerely,



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



Routes into Post-16 Education and Training

Response to the CYPE Committee Report (November 2025)

14/01/2026

In November 2025, the Children, Young People and Education Committee published the findings of its inquiry into routes into post-16 education and training. The report includes 16 recommendations.

This is the Welsh Government's response to the recommendations.

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1. Introduction

The Welsh Government is grateful to the members of the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee for their report on routes into post-16 education and training, which makes recommendations across a range of Ministerial portfolios.

Improving post-16 participation is central to our vision for a fairer, more prosperous Wales - ensuring every young person has the opportunity to progress, gain higher-level skills, and contribute to a strong, sustainable economy.

Through the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act, the Welsh Government established Medr to create a single, coherent post-16 system. Medr aligns planning, funding, and quality across schools, colleges, universities, and apprenticeships - simplifying learner pathways and widening participation to meet Wales's future skills needs. Some of the recommendations in this report are specifically for Medr who will be providing a separate response to the Committee.

Young people across Wales should have access to a wide range of education and training pathways that reflect their individual needs and ambitions. While it is suggested in this report that sixth forms focus solely on academic routes and colleges on vocational courses, in fact both settings can offer diverse opportunities - academic, vocational, and blended - empowering learners to achieve their goals. Recognising this breadth and ensuring parity of esteem between pathways is essential to creating a system where every young person feels supported and confident in their choices.

In November, the Minister for Further and Higher Education set out in an Oral Statement five pressing challenges facing Wales' tertiary education sector, with the first focused on increasing participation. We will shortly publish an evidence paper providing further detail on these challenges, alongside a call for stakeholder submissions.

In parallel, the Welsh Government will in March publish a *Prospectus for Strategic Direction for Vocational Education and Training in Wales*. This will act as a key subset of the wider review of tertiary education.

The Welsh Government is also bringing together multiple strands of analysis, including social research, data linkage, and systematic evidence reviews, to build a cumulative evidence base on the key determinants and trends shaping participation, progression, and non-progression in Wales.

This cumulative evidence base, together with the CYPE Committee's report, will underpin Welsh Government's long-term approach to delivering meaningful and sustainable change across the tertiary education system.

As we near the end of this Senedd term, implementation of the majority of recommendations in this report will fall to the Welsh Government in place after May's elections. However, we remain determined to build on the momentum gained, progress key actions wherever feasible, and carry this momentum into the next Senedd term.

2. Response to the 16 recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government should create a robust, over-arching, national strategy for post-16 education and training which includes, but is not limited to, pathways into employment. The strategy should encompass both academic and vocational pathways, thereby creating a strategic vision for a coherent and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.

Response: Accept in Principle

On 25 November, the Minister for Further and Higher Education made an oral statement acknowledging the need for reform in the next Senedd term. The statement outlined the long-term challenges facing the tertiary sector and set out plans to launch a call for submissions on tertiary education participation and sustainability. This call for submissions is planned to launch in January and will provide robust evidence to inform future policy decisions.

In addition, a *Prospectus for the Strategic Direction for Vocational Education and Training in Wales* will be published prior to the pre-election period. It will reflect the conclusions of a Reference Group of key stakeholders convened to consider how best to strengthen vocational education and training in Wales. The Prospectus will also be guided by 43 overlapping recommendations from two key reports: the Review of Vocational Qualifications (September 2023) and Transitions to Employment (June 2023). This publication will complement the call for submissions, representing sector views and forming a key subset of the wider review of tertiary education.

The decision whether to produce either a broad tertiary strategy or a specific vocational strategy will be shaped by the outcomes of both the call for submissions and the *Prospectus*.

Financial Implications:

To be determined based on the content of any strategy document.

Recommendation 2

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its assessment of whether there would be benefit in expanding the good practice by the Cardiff Commitment and the Ynys Môn Career Pathways pilot programme to other areas of Wales, and any barriers that exist to doing so at a local authority or regional level.

Response: Accept in Principle

No formal evaluation has been undertaken of the North RSP's Ynys Môn Careers Pathway project, the North RSP has reported the project demonstrates a promising foundation for future programmes aimed at aligning education and employment pathways.

The Cardiff Commitment is an initiative that has been developed and led by Cardiff Council with key partners. Cardiff Council published a comprehensive Cardiff Commitment Impact Report covering achievements over two years.

In 2022 Estyn highlighted the Cardiff Commitment as an effective practice for reducing NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) rates and improving post-16 progression.

The Welsh Government accepts that both the Cardiff Commitment and Ynys Mon Careers Pathways project represent examples of good practice in terms of effective collaboration which could be replicated more widely across Wales. We will work with key partners including local authorities, education providers, Regional Skills Partnership, Careers Wales and employers to promote good practice and to embed the principle of partnership working across agencies to provide better support, information and guidance to learners, parents and employers. This will also complement the approach taken under our Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, to reduce the number of young people who are NEET.

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Government should expand the Junior Apprenticeships scheme to ensure that it is available to learners across Wales who are at risk of disengaging with their education. In doing so, it should address Estyn's concerns about Junior Apprenticeships, including about inconsistencies in the referral criteria, in the information provided to parents and in quality assurance processes; and ensure that robust safeguarding measures are embedded into the programme to protect 14-16 year-old learners as they experience education in a post-16 setting.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government is already working with Medr and our FEI partners across Wales to make Junior Apprenticeships available to more learners across Wales. Our draft budget for 2026/27 includes a £1m budget for the programme, that is more than double the programme's budget in 2024/25.

The Welsh Government is continuing to consider the recommendations made in the 2024 Estyn thematic review which included addressing inconsistencies in referral criteria, quality assurance and information provided to parents, and safeguarding measures. We will work with Medr to develop options to address these issues whilst recognising the subtle differences in the delivery and operational contexts of the existing Junior Apprenticeship programmes across the country, as well as the range of part-time provision available in colleges for learners aged 14 to 16.

Medr will continue to work with existing and new FEI partners to seek out opportunities for expanding the programme.

Financial Implications:

The draft budget includes a £1m commitment to Junior Apprenticeship provision in 2026/27. This represents a doubling of the budget since 2024/25. Nationwide expansion would require further funding.

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should clarify its approach to Wales-wide pre-16 vocational education. In doing so, the Welsh Government should set out clearly how provision such as Junior Apprenticeships, other college-based pre-16 education, and VCSEs form a coherent and holistic vocational offer for compulsory school-age learners.

Response: Accept

Our 14 to 16 Learning Entitlement and accompanying guidance sets out our approach to pre-16 general and vocational education. It sets-out our expectation that learners should be given the opportunity to consider their post-16 career options and plans with dedicated time to assess their own strengths and areas for improvement.

To further broaden and simplify learner choice, we are enhancing the ‘qualifications to encourage breadth’ element of the Learner Entitlement by introducing new VCSE qualifications from September 2027. These will simplify the vast range of pre-16 vocational qualifications currently available into a set of fifteen consistent subjects with the same value as GCSEs. They will provide learners in mainstream schools with a taste of vocational education to inform their next steps once they leave compulsory education.

We encourage schools and colleges to collaborate in delivering pre-16 vocational education to learners, and we are pleased to see the range of part-time opportunities already offered to learners in a college setting. They provide learners with a greater breadth of learning and opportunities to consider their post-16 pathways. My officials will be considering how we can strengthen the guidance to foster greater collaboration between providers, to increase learner choice, and make learners more aware of the range of pathways available to them when they leave compulsory education at 16.

While it is vocational in focus, our Junior Apprenticeship programme is a dedicated full-time pathway aimed at learners who are at risk of becoming NEET. The programme would not be suitable for the majority of learners but it provides an alternative pathway for the minority of learners at risk of disengaging from education. There is also a range of part-time provision available in many colleges for learners aged 14 to 16, enabling them to study more vocational options in a college setting for several hours each week.

Financial Implications:

As set out above, the draft budget includes a £1m commitment to Junior Apprenticeship provision in 2026/27.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government, working with Medr, should carry out a review of post-16 funding and legislation to explore:

- whether, and to what extent, the current funding system incentivises competition between providers that affects the impartiality of careers advice for learners;
- how individual schools and colleges have overcome funding challenges to work together effectively;
- whether any changes should be made to the post-16 funding system and legislation to incentivise collaboration between post-16 institutions (e.g. by moving away from a funding model based on pupil numbers, by providing grant funding to reward collaboration, or otherwise).

Response: Accept in Principle

We recognise that there is a need to review and consider current funding models to better deliver for learners, give stability to providers, and secure best value for public funds. That is why we have listed financial sustainability and competition and collaboration between providers as two of our five headline challenges for the sector going forward in our Call for Submissions, scheduled to be published in January, and we will be seeking stakeholders' views on the wider financial challenges facing the tertiary sector to inform future policy.

Medr's operational plan commits to a "thorough review and analysis of the current tertiary education funding models to identify priorities for change". Such work will need to align with the priorities of the next Welsh Government.

Financial Implications:

To be determined based on the content of any strategy document.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should expand the existing 14-16 Learner Entitlement to include the wider package of advice, guidance and opportunities that learners are entitled to in Key Stage 4. This extended 14-16 Learner Entitlement should include the fundamental components of a high quality and effective transition to post-16 education, such as the right to high quality careers advice from their schools and Careers Wales; access to representatives of colleges, work-based providers and universities; and work experience. The specific entitlements should reflect the Welsh Government's wider policy offer, be promoted to learners and their families directly, and be used by Estyn and others to hold service providers to account for the support they provide to learners.

Response: Accept in Principle

Our 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement and accompanying guidance sets out the advice, guidance and opportunities that learners are entitled to in Key Stage 4. The Welsh Government recognises the need to work with stakeholders to explore strengthening this Entitlement to include specific requirements that representatives of colleges, work-based providers and universities have access to learners to inform them of the opportunities available in work, further education or higher education post-16.

Further to a recommendation in the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee - Apprenticeship Pathways report - in July, the Welsh Government will also continue to explore lessons learned from the introduction of the Baker Clause in England. This legislation requires schools to allow colleges and training providers access to pupils in Years 8 to 13 to promote technical and vocational pathways alongside academic options.

Expanding the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement is aligned with Careers Wales' offer to every learner of impartial, high-quality careers advice and experiences that prepare them for post-16 transitions. Careers Wales already offers careers guidance to all young people before they leave Year 11 and additional targeted support for those at risk of poor transitions. However, due to challenges in a small number of schools relating to access to learners, this offer could potentially be strengthened through the Learner Entitlement.

Careers and Work-Related Experiences (CWRE) is a cross-cutting theme in our curriculum, which will be fully rolled out by September 2026. CWRE is embedded throughout a learner's education, age 3 to 16. This ensures learners build valuable experiences and can apply their knowledge and skills in inspiring, real-world contexts.

Financial Implications:

Delivering an expanded entitlement will require additional capacity and funding for Careers Wales to coordinate work experience nationally.

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should commission Estyn to carry out a thematic review of Careers Wales' careers advice service. The review should focus specifically on Careers Wales' 'standard' offer, and should consider whether it meets the needs of all learners and their families, and what changes, if any, could be made to improve the provision.

Response: Reject

An Estyn review of careers guidance in secondary and special schools was completed in 2022. This review concluded that most eligible young people made good progress in planning their futures following careers guidance sessions.

Since that time, Careers Wales has introduced a new careers guidance offer. From September 2024, all learners are offered a careers guidance interview prior to leaving mainstream education. This is in addition to their targeted support for those most at risk. Uptake has been strong, with over 86% of the 2024/25 Year 11 cohort taking up the offer. This significant enhancement to the offer is only briefly referenced in the Committee's report.

Looking ahead, Careers Wales is actively evaluating their current offer to inform their new strategy for implementation in 2027. To inform this work, Careers Wales is gathering views from learners, parents, schools, employers, and partners. Welsh Government officials are also reviewing existing research to support Careers Wales with their future planning.

Following completion of Careers Wales's evaluation, if further evidence is deemed necessary, Welsh Government officials will consider options for additional research at that stage. Commissioning an Estyn review now would duplicate recent work and ongoing evaluation activity.

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should commission a focused piece of research to better understand why some employers are unable or unwilling to offer work experience placements, and what steps can be taken by the Welsh Government or others to overcome those barriers.

Response: Reject

Significant work has already been undertaken to understand employer perspectives on work experience. In September 2023, Welsh Government convened a roundtable discussion with employers, key stakeholders, and Vaughan Gething MS, then Minister for Economy. Key themes emerging from this engagement included;

- The importance of a designated role within schools to coordinate work experience.
- The need for a streamlined, single point of contact for businesses, as employers lack capacity to respond to multiple approaches from different organisations.

Welsh Government officials are in the final stages of publishing comprehensive work experience placement guides for employers, young people, schools, and parents. In addition, as part of the Young Person's Guarantee, Business Wales has produced a good practice guide for employers, outlining actions to improve engagement with young people, including promoting work experience opportunities.

Further intelligence will be available through the UK Employer Skills Survey (ESS), a key source of data on employer skills challenges and workforce development. The 2024 ESS surveyed 22,712 UK employers, including 5,605 in Wales. Wales-specific findings will be published in February 2026 and will include:

- The proportion of employers offering work placements or internships, with details on type, duration, payment, and progression to paid roles.
- Reasons employers do and do not offer work placements.
- The value employers place on work experience when recruiting.

Welsh Government officials will be developing targeted analysis of Welsh employer's experiences of work placements, enabling breakdowns by region, employer size, sector, and other variables, subject to sample size.

Additional questions could also be included in the Business Omnibus survey to explore motivations and barriers further, though this would incur additional cost.

Given this ongoing work and forthcoming data, commissioning a separate research project at this stage would duplicate existing efforts.

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Government should explicitly include the impact on young people's access to post-16 education and training amongst its terms of reference in the forthcoming independent evaluation of its pilot of £1 maximum single fare/£3 maximum daily fare bus travel for young people.

Response: Accept

We welcome the Committee's recommendations and agree that understanding the impact of the £1 maximum single fare/£3 maximum daily fare pilot on young people's access to post-16 education and training is essential. The forthcoming independent evaluation will therefore explicitly consider this issue within its terms of reference. We recognise that the success of the scheme depends on the experiences of young people themselves, as well as the operators who deliver services, and we are committed to ensuring their perspectives shape the findings.

The evaluation will include comprehensive engagement with young people, bus operators, and organisations that represent their interests, including the Children's Commissioner for Wales. A mixed-method approach will be used to gather robust evidence on how the scheme is working in practice. An interim report will be available around six months after the evaluation begins, with draft findings expected at approximately nine months. This approach will ensure that the impact on access to post-16 opportunities is fully understood and used to inform future policy development.

Financial Implications:

There are no additional financial implications associated with accepting this recommendation, as the monitoring and evaluation framework was already designed to include the areas highlighted by the Committee.

Recommendation 10

Medr should improve the quality and timeliness of published data about learners' education and training between the ages of 16 and 18, in response to the concerns set out in this report. In doing so, Medr should pay particular attention to:

- data that follows learners' pathways at each stage after they leave year 11, to help understand learners' choices and where, why and when learners may be leaving or dropping out of education and training; and
- data about learners in FE colleges and work-based learning, particularly learners who are undertaking level 1 and 2 courses, including destinations for those on one-year courses.

Response:

Medr will provide a separate response to the Committee in relation to this recommendation.

Recommendation 11

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out an analysis of:

- why it believes that there is such a discrepancy between the proportion of learners who want to undertake an apprenticeship and the proportion of learners who end up doing one; and
- the extent to which barriers facing employers (such as the funding for apprenticeship programmes, and a lack of awareness amongst small to medium businesses) have contributed to the significant discrepancy between the demand for apprenticeship amongst young people and the actual number of apprenticeships available.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government recognises that parity of esteem between vocational and academic routes remains a significant challenge. Despite strong interest among learners, advice and guidance sometimes favour academic pathways, and the number of apprenticeship places is also affected by funding constraints, employer demand, and the availability of opportunities in key sectors. To address this, we are working closely with education colleagues, Careers Wales, and Medr to ensure learners receive balanced, high-quality guidance on all options, including apprenticeships. This work aligns with the Welsh Government's work on a Prospectus for the Strategic Direction of Vocational Education and Training in Wales VET strategy, which is considering ways in which to strengthen vocational pathways and promote their value alongside academic routes.

While the Welsh Government provides 100% funding for apprenticeship training costs, wider economic pressures and UK Government policies on National Insurance and minimum wage have limited the number of opportunities available. Small and medium-sized businesses, in particular, face barriers such as lack of awareness, administrative burden, and limited capacity. To address these, the Welsh Government and Medr are reviewing employer guidance, supporting the shared apprenticeships programme, and providing clear information through the Business Wales Advisory Service. Initiatives like Apprenticeship Week also help raise awareness and encourage employer participation, ensuring apprenticeship opportunities remain responsive to both learner and employer needs.

Medr now has operational responsibility for apprenticeship funding, programme design, and framework review. In developing the new apprenticeship programme for delivery from August 2027, Medr is:

- Exploring what additional support employers need to offer apprenticeships, including the availability, accessibility, and appropriateness of information.
- Continuing to fund and review the shared apprenticeships model, which particularly enables SMEs to participate by allowing learners to complete requirements across several employers, and considering how this successful approach can be best incorporated within the new programme.
- Undertaking an ongoing programme of framework reviews to ensure that apprenticeship pathways are appropriate for enabling learners both to enter and to progress within employment sectors.

Medr's work directly supports the Welsh Government's aims by ensuring that apprenticeship provision is responsive to the needs of learners, employers, and the wider economy, and by helping to remove barriers to participation for both young people and businesses.

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation 12

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out:

- why it believes that young men appear to be consistently more likely to become NEET than young women;
- how its work to improve the rates of participation in post-16 education and training has taken into account the different challenges facing young women and men; and
- whether it believes that any further work needs to be undertaken to better understand why some young become NEET, particularly in relation to variations in rates between young women and men in Wales.

Response: Accept in Principle

Our Youth Engagement and Progression Framework identifies and supports 11–18-year-olds at risk of disengaging or homelessness. Strengthening this Framework and delivering the Young Person's Guarantee are key commitments in our Programme for Government to help young people progress to education, employment, training, or self-employment and to prevent homelessness.

In terms of engagement with tertiary education, a higher proportion of females progress from year 11 to tertiary education than males. However, when considering employment alongside education and training, current data does not support the view that young men are consistently more likely to be NEET. In Wales, 12.4% of males aged 16–24 were NEET in 2024, compared to 15.2% of females. Since 2023, male NEET rates fell by 2.7 percentage points, while female rates rose by 4.2 points. While women currently have higher NEET rates, persistent challenges for young men remain.

Risk factors differ by sex, age and additional need requirements. Research in England found males aged up to 25 are more likely to have additional learning needs, low attainment, and behavioural issues; young women are more likely to have had a child before the age of 25. Relative to girls, boys in Wales are more often assessed with additional learning needs and are more likely to display misalignment between their career ambitions and education plans.

To improve post-16 participation, Welsh Government provides universal and targeted interventions. Since September 2024, Careers Wales offers all learners a careers guidance interview before leaving statutory education, plus enhanced support for those at risk. The Attainment Champions Programme targets underperforming boys, and the Curriculum for Wales promotes flexible pathways.

'A Rapid Evidence Review: supporting young people who are not in employment, education, or training' was published in January 2024. The Welsh Government is committed to deepening our understanding of the underlying causes of NEET status, particularly in relation to sex differences and intersectionality. We continue to review evidence, including the Millennium Cohort Study and the Young Person's Guarantee evaluation, to adapt interventions and reduce NEET rates through evidence-based action

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation 13

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its expectations of how post-16 education and training providers should provide careers advice and guidance to young people to help them make informed decisions about their steps post-18. In doing so, the Welsh Government should outline clearly where responsibility lies for that advice and the role of Estyn in holding institutions to account for the support they provide.

Response: Accept

Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) are a cross-cutting theme within the Curriculum for Wales and should be embedded in learning across the curriculum by schools. The 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement emphasises the importance of schools supporting learners to plan for their next steps post-16.

Post-16 learners in schools and Further Education Institutions (FEIs) should continue to be provided with a careers education, including providing learners with access to both guidance materials and a wide range of up-to-date resources. To support this, the Careers Wales Post-16 **Career Development Award** recognises educational institutions that demonstrate a strong commitment to delivering high-quality careers education and guidance for learners aged 16 and above. The award builds on the principles of continuous improvement, and provides a clear framework for enhancing careers provision, and ensuring learners receive impartial advice and practical support to make informed decisions. By achieving this award, providers can showcase their dedication to preparing young people for successful transitions into employment, further education, or training.

Schools and FEIs should also more generally draw on the services provided by Careers Wales, who can help learners to better understand the world of work, the skills they need and the opportunities available to them. Careers Wales careers advisers are linked to every sixth form and FEI, giving all post-16 learners access to impartial careers guidance. This includes the ability to access the Careers Wales online booking system to book an appointment with a careers adviser, either in-person or online.

General and vocational programmes of learning for 16 to 18 year olds, set out by Medr, include funding for 'Community Learner Industry Focus', supporting careers education for learners. Providers can tailor this element of their offer to meet the specific needs of their learners, and local and/or specific employer needs. Full-time vocational programmes, that include qualifications with mandatory work experience, include a Work Related Experience component within the programme. This includes time allocated to learners to develop and refine their practical skills, which should help them progress to employment or further

learning. For all other vocational programmes, learners are able to top up their full-time programmes with additional work experience hours that are funded via a different funding stream. Separately, Medr funds FEIs to run Employment and Enterprise Bureaus that prepare learners to enter the labour market, ensuring they are fully informed of the career options available to them.

Welsh Government is currently developing 16 to 18 local curriculum guidance for Medr; we will consult on this guidance in early 2026. The guidance will summarise how post-16 providers should build on CWRE within Curriculum for Wales, helping learners consider the full range of options available to them at the end of their 16 to 18 education.

Estyn holds schools and FEIs to account for the quality of education they provide to learners under three main inspection areas: teaching and learning; well-being, care, support and guidance; and leading and improving. Estyn's 'What we inspect' guides specify that in school inspections, they will consider how far schools provide pupils with effective and impartial advice relating to the next steps in their development. For FEIs, inspectors consider the degree to which learners develop their employability and career progression skills, and how well the college provides impartial guidance and advice, either directly or via external agencies, about their career options and the world of work.

Financial Implications:

None.

Recommendation 14

Medr should work with ColegauCymru to evaluate where there are gaps in data about learners in FE colleges (such as their destinations post-18), and take steps to address those gaps by developing an accurate, timely and reliable dataset with a view to making that an annual release by the end of the 2025/26 academic year.

Response:

Medr will provide a separate response to the Committee in relation to this recommendation.

Recommendation 15

As part of its approach to developing a degree apprenticeship framework for August 2027 onwards, Medr should carry out an assessment of the benefits or otherwise of the following in relation to increasing the number of degree apprenticeships available:

- employers contributing to the cost of degree apprenticeship tuition fees, alongside the salary they pay the apprentice; and
- giving HE institutions the autonomy to develop degree apprenticeships independently of the Welsh Government.

Response:

Medr will provide a separate response to the Committee in relation to this recommendation.

Recommendation 16

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should provide an update on its ongoing discussions with the UK Government about how the financial pressures facing Higher Education institutions can be addressed at a UK-wide level.

Response: Accept

Ministers have met with their UK Government counterparts on several occasions since February to discuss this matter. Officials met regularly with DfE and DSIT officials in the lead up to publication of the UK Government's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, which sets out the UK Government's own approach to addressing the financial pressures on higher education providers. We are considering the implications of that paper, and in particular the UK Government's proposed approach to research and innovation funding, for the financial position of Welsh universities.

We have also taken the decision that an international student levy will not apply in Wales, and we continue to highlight to the UK Government the importance of international students to the Welsh sector. The UK Government's decision to increase tuition fees in line with inflation has enabled Welsh Government to follow suit - this will generate an estimated £19m in revenue for Welsh higher education institutions in 2026/27.

Financial Implications:

None.

Medr response to the Children, Young People, and Education Committee's report on 'routes into post-16 education and training'

27 January 2026

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg |

This document is also available in Welsh

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Response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's report on 'routes into post-16 education and training'

Introduction

Medr welcomes the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee report on [Routes into post-16 education and training](#). The report, published on 12 November 2025, included 16 recommendations. We accept the findings and recommendations as they relate to Medr.

As the national steward of tertiary education and training in Wales, Medr is committed to shaping a tertiary education system in which everyone can acquire the skills and knowledge they need for a changing economy and society.¹ We recognise that coherent, easy-to-navigate learning pathways and improved flexibility will facilitate increased participation and retention and give learners greater access to opportunities that enable them to thrive.

The creation of Medr, and the commitments we have set out in our [Strategic Plan](#), contribute to making learner journeys more simple and flexible. Medr has a Strategic Duty to promote lifelong learning and widening participation across the post-16 sector, including further education, apprenticeships, adult and community learning, higher education, and work-based- learning. This broad remit places Medr at the centre of delivering the report's ambitions for a more coherent, flexible and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.² We will do so by aligning our regulatory and funding frameworks and will continue to work with Welsh Government and partners across the post-16 sector to create a sector where learners can move confidently between pathways and access high-quality learning opportunities.

In our role overseeing a joined-up tertiary system, we are committed to building an understanding of learner behaviour and decision making, including through the effective use of data, so that we can identify the factors that drive learner choices and develop robust insight into learner journeys across the system. We are already making improvements to the breadth and timeliness of the data we publish, and through our Strategic and Operational Plans we have committed to strengthening the evidence base that underpins policy development and system stewardship. Central to this work is our commitment to working collaboratively with key stakeholders to further improve the breadth and timeliness of data, ensuring it supports a more coherent, responsive and learner focused tertiary education system.

This response outlines the actions we are taking, or are planning to take, to address the findings relating to data, funding and policy reform. The report also makes a number of recommendations for Welsh Government where Medr can be expected to have a role. Our contributions to these recommendations are set out below.

¹ Strategic Aim 2, [Medr Strategic Plan 2025-2030](#)

² **Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should create a robust, over-arching, national strategy for post-16 education and training which includes, but is not limited to, pathways into employment. The strategy should encompass both academic and vocational pathways, thereby creating a strategic vision for a coherent and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.**

Recommendation 10:

Medr should improve the quality and timeliness of published data about learners' education and training between the ages of 16 and 18, in response to the concerns set out in this report. In doing so, Medr should pay particular attention to:

- **data that follows learners' pathways at each stage after they leave year 11, to help understand learners' choices and where, why and when learners may be leaving or dropping out of education and training; and**
- **data about learners in FE colleges and work-based learning, particularly learners who are undertaking level 1 and 2 courses, including destinations for those on one-year courses**

Accept

Medr currently publishes a range of statistics on different aspects of the tertiary education system. We aim to publish this information in as timely a manner as possible and consider user needs when developing our statistics.

When Medr was formed in August 2024 we inherited a number of data functions. We have since committed to make improvements to the breadth and timeliness of the data we publish, for example:

- In February 2025, we published an [analysis of progression from Year 11 to tertiary education between August 2017 and January 2025](#). We plan to update this annually.
- We will be introducing a new practice of publishing earlier provisional data for enrolments in [FE, work based learning and adult community learning](#). Provisional data for 2025/26 will be included in the February 2026 publication.
- We have made improvements in the timeliness of apprenticeship starts publications data by using earlier data freezes for publications.
- We have also recently published an [analysis of learner destinations from post-16 learning](#)

We continue to work closely with UCAS to ensure appropriate use of their data on applications to HE.

Our Strategic and Operational Plans include commitments to develop a strong evidence base, informed by data.³ As part of this work, we are developing a progression measure to track the journey of learners when moving between sectors, levels and programmes of study. This will provide a more timely indication of progression within the tertiary education system than is provided by our existing learner destinations statistics.

³ *We will establish baseline data to provide a strong evidence base for our own planning and decision making and for informing government policy. Informed by data, and working with stakeholders, we will identify priorities for improvement, linked to national milestones (Strategic Plan, Founding Commitment)*

We are working to develop the way our data is presented to improve visibility and promote access and will be engaging with stakeholders for feedback on content in the coming months.

Recommendation 14:

Medr should work with ColegauCymru to evaluate where there are gaps in data about learners in FE colleges (such as their destinations post-18), and take steps to address those gaps by developing an accurate, timely and reliable dataset with a view to making that an annual release by the end of the 2025/26 academic year.

Accept

As outlined above in our response to recommendation 10, we are committed to improving the breadth and timeliness of our data.

We published an [analysis of learner destinations from post-16 learning](#) in December 2025. There is an inherent time lag in these statistics due to the complex data matching processes needed to calculate them. The development of more timely educational progression statistics (referred to in our response to Recommendation 10) aims to address these gaps.

Whilst our priority is to always ensure a statistical output which is robust and accurate, we will continue to work to make improvements to the timeliness of all our future publications wherever possible. As part of our processes for developing new and existing statistics, we will engage with key stakeholders including, but not limited to, ColegauCymru.

Recommendation 15:

As part of its approach to developing a degree apprenticeship framework for August 2027 onwards, Medr should carry out an assessment of the benefits or otherwise of the following in relation to increasing the number of degree apprenticeships available:

- ***employers contributing to the cost of degree apprenticeship tuition fees, alongside the salary they pay the apprentice; and***
- ***giving HE institutions the autonomy to develop degree apprenticeships independently of the Welsh Government***

Accept

Medr is currently developing a new Apprenticeship Programme to commence in August 2027 which will cover all levels of apprenticeships, including degree apprenticeships. The new programme will be more responsive and flexible to address skills priorities to meet our changing economy. Medr is working to identify how the programme can respond to

changing demands in an agile way to ensure the right qualifications and skills are delivered to meet employer, learner and economic needs, including the balance between apprenticeships offered at different levels. We recently consulted widely on the new programme. The outcomes of the consultation will be published in spring 2026. An updated funding model is a key element of the new programme development. In considering the potential for employer contributions towards degree apprenticeships, we will take into account the outcomes of the Welsh Government's call for submissions on tertiary education participation and sustainability. We are also engaging with employers to understand the barriers and opportunities for them in relation to apprenticeship provision.

Medr, as the designated Issuing Authority, is responsible for developing and issuing [apprenticeship frameworks](#) in Wales. To be considered a Welsh Apprenticeship, provision must be included within a published framework. All frameworks are developed and tested in collaboration with industry experts, learning providers or universities and key stakeholders to ensure they meet the needs of the Welsh economy, evidenced by strong labour market intelligence and employer support, as well as meeting the requirements of the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards Wales (SASW). There are currently 23 apprenticeship frameworks across all sectors, and Medr has an ongoing programme of framework review to ensure they are up to date. Each review considers whether the framework includes appropriate pathways and progression routes, including to degree level. Degree apprenticeships were added to the construction framework in 2024/25, expanding the range of frameworks in which degree apprenticeship provision is available. A new construction degree pathway in Design will commence in September 2026. Maintaining an ongoing programme of framework review is a key element of ensuring that the new apprenticeship programme is responsive and agile.

Recommendation 1:

The Welsh Government should create a robust, over-arching, national strategy for post-16 education and training which includes, but is not limited to, pathways into employment. The strategy should encompass both academic and vocational pathways, thereby creating a strategic vision for a coherent and collaborative post-16 sector that encourages learners to obtain education and skills via whichever educational pathway is right for them.

Medr will continue to work to deliver of a more coherent and collaborative post-16 sector in line with our strategic duties by aligning our regulatory and funding frameworks to support a more integrated and learner-centred post-16 system. Achieving this vision requires genuine collaboration across the sector, and we are committed to working closely with partners to ensure that reforms are shaped by practical insight and the shared priorities set out in the report.

Medr has also recently undertaken a comprehensive mapping exercise of Higher Education provision which provides a strong evidence base to inform future policy direction and will form the basis of our submission to the call for evidence on participation and financial sustainability from the Minister for Further and Higher Education.

Medr continues to contribute to the Welsh Government's Vocational Education and Training (VET) Stakeholder Reference Group, which is considering future priorities for a VET strategy for Wales.

Recommendation 3:

The Welsh Government should expand the Junior Apprenticeships scheme to ensure that it is available to learners across Wales who are at risk of disengaging with their education. In doing so, it should address Estyn's concerns about Junior Apprenticeships, including about inconsistencies in the referral criteria, in the information provided to parents and in quality assurance processes; and ensure that robust safeguarding measures are embedded into the programme to protect 14-16 year-old learners as they experience education in a post-16 setting.

Expansion of the Junior Apprenticeship programme

In line with our Strategic Duty to encourage participation in tertiary education, Medr, working with the Welsh Government and the sector, successfully expanded Junior Apprenticeship provision to two further colleges in Wales for the 2025/26 academic year. Junior Apprenticeships provide learners at risk of disengaging from education with a meaningful pathway to Further Education (FE), apprenticeships and employment. Seven colleges across Wales now offer this provision. This was largely made possible by the

additional £200k (taking the total to £600k) invested in the programme by Welsh Government for 2025/26.

Medr will continue to work closely with the Welsh Government and further education colleges on the continued expansion of junior apprenticeships programme, increasing provision and choice for young learners in Wales, particularly those who have challenges engaging with more traditional pathways. Welsh Government has allocated an increased budget of £1m to support this further expansion in 2026/27. Nationwide adoption would, however, require a further increase in budget.

We recognise the importance of providing clear pathways for learners on junior apprenticeships to progress on to further learning, including higher level apprenticeships, and the importance of quality assurance in ensuring that the programme equips learners with the skills they need to progress (see below).

Concerns raised by Estyn

In response to Estyn's recommendations on addressing inconsistencies in referral criteria, quality assurance, information provided to parents, and safeguarding measures, Medr has worked with Welsh Government, Local Authorities and colleges to develop a guidance document that begins to address these issues.

The guidance encourages FE Colleges, schools and Local Authorities to ensure a robust selection process that includes determining a learner's aptitude for vocational learning. The Learner Entry and Eligibility Criteria also states that the selection process must consider whether the learner is at risk of becoming NEET and likely to benefit from this provision.

In relation to Estyn's concerns relating to quality assurance, Medr's guidance states that FE colleges should submit timely data to LLWR in line with the Post-16 Data Management Principles 2022. The Data Submission Requirements section requires institutions to ensure that data is submitted in the correct format and in a timely manner, in line with the conditions set out in the annual Terms and Conditions of Funding.

Medr will use LLWR data to monitor compliance with the programme specification. This will include programme monitoring of data and activity datasets to check that programme delivery requirements are being met. Medr is currently working to develop performance measures that includes learner destinations as this will be crucial in evaluating programme delivery. The aim of this provision is to enable learners who successfully complete the JA Programme to progress on to further learning, apprenticeship or employment at the age of 16.

The guidance also requires colleges to share information with learners, parents, and schools to ensure they are fully informed of the suitability of individual courses, taking care to avoid and work to overcome traditional gender stereotypes. It also requires schools to work collaboratively with the college to ensure that prospective learners and parents/carers receive comprehensive, impartial advice and guidance about all curriculum options that would be appropriate for the individual learner, as well as Junior Apprenticeships, where these are available.

Colleges are required to perform robust individual risk assessments, including operational risk assessments, and clarify responsibility for safeguarding arrangements for all learners and follow the 'All Wales Child and Adult Protection Procedures 2008' and the 'Prevent Duty Guidance 2015' when dealing with disclosures, concerns or allegations relating to safety, welfare and wellbeing. This includes any work experience placements arranged by the college. The guidance also requires schools to take responsibility for operational risk assessments for learners where they are dually registered and requires Local Authorities to provide support and guidance in relation to any safeguarding issue that cannot be resolved between the school and the college.

We will continue to work with Welsh Government and the sector to address the concerns raised by Estyn.

Recommendation 5:

The Welsh Government, working with Medr, should carry out a review of post-16 funding and legislation to explore:

- ***whether, and to what extent, the current funding system incentivises competition between providers that affects the impartiality of careers advice for learners;***
- ***how individual schools and colleges have overcome funding challenges to work together effectively***
- ***whether any changes should be made to the post-16 funding system and legislation to incentivise collaboration between post-16 institutions (e.g. by moving away from a funding model based on pupil numbers, by providing grant funding to reward collaboration, or otherwise)***

The tertiary education sector is diverse, and we are committed to ensuring that our policies and funding create a system that fosters collaboration and enables more opportunities for every learner to realise their potential. In responding to Medr's strategic duty to promote collaboration and coherence in tertiary education and research, we have in train a programme of work which aligns with this recommendation. The full provisions of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 will come into force over the next few years which will support us in taking these ambitions forward.

In our Operational Plan, we have committed to developing and consulting externally on our funding policy principles. We have also committed to conducting a thorough review and analysis of the current tertiary education funding models to identify priorities for change. This work will need to align with the priorities of the next Welsh Government and consider the outcomes of the current government's call for evidence.

In October 2025, Medr launched a Post-16 Strategic Development Fund to encourage more collaboration within the tertiary education sector. The bidding process provides us with further intelligence from the sector about the type of projects that could be possible with some strategic investment, to inform future planning.

Recommendation 9:

The Welsh Government should explicitly include the impact on young people's access to post-16 education and training amongst its terms of reference in the forthcoming independent evaluation of its pilot of £1 maximum single fare/£3 maximum daily fare bus travel for young people.

While transport to and from educational settings is not within Medr's remit, we are aware from regular discussions with providers of the extent of this issue for learners across the tertiary education sector in Wales. We raised this at the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Summit in May 2025.

We will continue to work with Welsh Government to provide sector- and learner-information to inform its considerations, to feed into the post-16 workstream on learner travel.

Recommendation 11:

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out an analysis of:

- ***why it believes that there is such a discrepancy between the proportion of learners who want to undertake an apprenticeship and the proportion of learners who end up doing one; and***
- ***the extent to which barriers facing employers (such as the funding for apprenticeship programmes, and a lack of awareness amongst small to medium businesses) have contributed to the significant discrepancy between the demand for apprenticeship amongst young people and the actual number of apprenticeships available.***

As part of our wider engagement with employers and learners, Medr is seeking to better understand the factors and barriers that influence both learner choices and employer capacity, including funding constraints and awareness among small and medium sized businesses, and is reviewing employer engagement and initiatives such as the shared apprenticeships programme in collaboration with partners including Business Wales. This work directly supports the Welsh Government's aims by ensuring apprenticeship provision is responsive to the needs of learners, employers and the wider economy, while also helping to remove barriers to participation for both young people and businesses.

In developing the new apprenticeship programme to be delivered from August 2027, we are exploring what additional support employers need to be able offer apprenticeships, including the availability, accessibility and appropriateness of information available to them. Our ongoing engagement with employers provides insights into employer needs and barriers to accessing appropriate tertiary education provision.

We continue to fund shared apprenticeships, which particularly enable SMEs to offer apprenticeships by enabling learners to complete the apprenticeship requirements across several employers, and we are reviewing how this successful model can be best incorporated into the new programme. Our ongoing programme of framework reviews considers whether the pathways available are appropriate for enabling learners both to enter and to progress within an employment sector.

We will continue to work with Careers Wales, as well as with the tertiary education provider network, to improve the information, advice and guidance available to learners about apprenticeships. Medr is undertaking a programme of work with providers to strengthen the learner voice, which will contribute to our understanding of the factors influencing apprenticeship choices. Alongside this, we are establishing employer forums to explore the barriers employers face – including funding challenges and limited awareness among SMEs. This combined approach will support a clearer analysis of the reasons behind the current discrepancy and inform targeted actions to improve both learner engagement and employer participation.

More broadly, Medr is exploring mechanisms for establishing structured, strategic discussions with employers through business representative organisations, with the aim of building a mutual understanding of how the tertiary education sector in Wales can meet current and future skills needs and how Medr can support the development and availability of appropriate provision.

We recognise the need to improve advice and guidance to address the gap between learners' interest in apprenticeships and actual participation, however it is important to acknowledge that learners access apprenticeships through a range of pathways. When the proportion of learners undertaking an apprenticeship between age 16 and 19 are taken into account, the gap between aspiration and participation is notably smaller.

Recommendation 12:

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out:

- ***why it believes that young men appear to be consistently more likely to become NEET than young women;***
- ***how its work to improve the rates of participation in post-16 education and training has taken into account the different challenges facing young women and men; and***
- ***whether it believes that any further work needs to be undertaken to better understand the underlying causes of NEETs, particularly in relation to variations in NEET rates between young women and men in Wales***

We recognise that participation rates in tertiary education are too low and the number of people not in education, employment or training is too high when compared to other regions of the UK. The persistently high level of NEETs in Wales is affected by a complex range of factors and will require a range of cross-Government interventions to tackle them.

Encouraging participation, promoting equality of opportunity, and lifelong learning in tertiary education are strategic duties for Medr set out in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. In our Strategic Plan we have committed to work with partners, including the Welsh Government and Careers Wales, to encourage more pre-16 learners to transition to tertiary education and reduce the proportion of people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

We have committed to develop an evidence base on participation in tertiary education, identifying levels of participation across the tertiary sector by region, drawing on social research and Medr's broader engagement activity. We will also set targets to increase participation, particularly among those underrepresented in tertiary education, who may face social, economic, cultural or organisational barriers to learning. One example of an intervention aiming to tackle this issue is the Junior Apprenticeship Programme (see response to recommendation 3).

Medr's equality of opportunity condition for regulation and funding emphasises the importance of widening participation, particularly for groups traditionally under-represented in tertiary education. As part of this focus, providers are expected to demonstrate meaningful actions that improve access, retention and outcomes for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. This aligns closely with initiatives such as the Reaching Wider programme, which prioritises engagement with school and college learners living in the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, helping to ensure that those facing the greatest structural barriers are supported to progress into higher-level study.

Recommendation 13:

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its expectations of how post-16 education and training providers should provide careers advice and guidance to young people to help them make informed decisions about their steps post-18. In doing so, the Welsh Government should outline clearly where responsibility lies for that advice and the role of Estyn in holding institutions to account for the support they provide.

Within all post-16 mainstream programmes of study in local authorities and further education colleges, there is both a Work-Related Experience (WRE) strand and a Community Learner Industry Focus (CLIF) strand, which ensures that academic learning can be directly linked to real-world practice and community impact.

Medr provides funding to 12 FE colleges to run Employment and Enterprise Bureaus. The funding supports learner transition from education into employment or self-employment by developing the employability and entrepreneurial skills they need to achieve positive outcomes. The Bureaus prepare learners to enter the labour market, ensuring they are fully informed of the career options available to them, and facilitate links with employers, increasing the opportunities available to learners within colleges.

Ensuring access to careers advice will require close collaboration between Medr and key partners such as Careers Wales. Our strategic plan includes a commitment to work with

partners, including Welsh Government and Careers Wales, to encourage more pre-16 learners to progress into and succeed in tertiary education and to reduce the proportion who become NEET.

We recognise the leading role that Careers Wales, schools and local authorities all play in providing advice and guidance to pre-16 learners. This is critical to ensuring that young people have clear information on the full range of opportunities available to them after leaving compulsory schooling. Medr's work on learner voice includes the development of a new learner survey, which will help us to better understand learners' views of their experiences of tertiary education and how well it prepares them for their next steps into further learning or employment.

Reaching Wider plays a vital role in raising aspirations for higher education by creating inclusive, supportive pathways for learners who may not have previously considered university as an option. Through its mentoring programme, students are paired with trained mentors who offer encouragement, relatable guidance, and practical support in navigating educational choices. This personalised approach helps learners build confidence, understand the opportunities available to them, and develop clear goals for their future. Together, Reaching Wider and its mentoring programme empower individuals not only to imagine themselves in higher education, but to take the concrete steps needed to make those ambitions a reality.

Welsh Government is currently developing 16 to 18 local curriculum guidance for Medr which will set out the legal duties on the formation of 16 to 18 local curricula in Wales, which includes considerations of advice and guidance relating to the provision available in the post-16 space. We will work with WG following consultation.

Medr

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

Ref:TC.CS.061125.BW

6 November 2025

Dear Buffy,

**Children, Young People and Education Committee's
Sixth Senedd Legacy Report**

I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you our public health policy priorities to inform the development of the Children, Young People and Education Committee's Sixth Senedd Legacy Report.

Public Health Wales is the national public health organisation for Wales. We exist to help all people in Wales live longer, healthier lives, and to make health part of every conversation about Wales' future.

We are highlighting five priority areas where we believe public health policy action can build a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Wales for the future, and support a strong sustainable health and care system.

By sharing these with you, we hope to support the work your Committee is doing to highlight the issues the Seventh Senedd, and your successor Committee may wish to consider.

1 Context

People in Wales are currently experiencing unfair and avoidable gaps in health and wellbeing. For example, women in the least deprived areas of Wales live 20 years more of their life in good health than those who live in the most deprived areas. In our most deprived communities, we also see three times as many avoidable deaths and 70% more child deaths. Without change, poor health in our most deprived communities will continue to result in increased demand for our public services.

Through a prevention-first approach to policy and by working together in partnership, we can overcome these challenges and build a healthier future for Wales. We know that every £1 invested in prevention returns £14 for society by creating healthier people, a stronger economy and lowered NHS costs.

Our five policy priorities

1. The best start in life builds lifelong health and wellbeing

The foundation for a life lived in good health is built in our early years. Policies need to promote the wellbeing of babies and young children and protect children from harm, for example from adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and poverty, to give them the best chance to thrive through life.

- Consider children's wellbeing in all policy decisions.
- Deliver the Best Start in Life framework through cross-government leadership.
- Ensure comprehensive child health data to guide policy, target support, and track outcomes for babies and young children.
- Ensure every family can easily access Health Visitor support, and provide Flying Start based on need, not postcode.
- Embed trauma and adverse childhood experience-informed approaches from pre-pregnancy onwards.

2. Financial wellbeing drives better health and a prosperous economy

Secure and fairly rewarded work that pays a living wage is good for our health. Healthy communities mean a healthy workforce, and a healthy, productive workforce is good for a prosperous Welsh economy. Policies need to support people in Wales to find, stay in or return to healthy, safe and secure work.

- Ensure public bodies provide safe, secure jobs paying at least the Real Living Wage.
- Monitor progress on workplace equality, including gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps.
- Support people with health challenges to enter, stay in, or return to work.

- Link employment services with health support especially for those with long-term or mental health conditions so people get help when they need it.

3. Healthy lives start in our everyday places

When the places where we live, eat, shop, and play are healthy, it is easier for all of us to live healthier and happier lives.

National planning and other policies need to create and strengthen healthier places strategically, regionally and locally to support physical, mental and social health and wellbeing and reduce the appeal and availability of health harming products.

Healthy communities – characterised by healthy homes, sustainable transport, safe space for active travel, and green spaces – create additional benefits to the environment.

- Increase the availability of healthy and affordable homes, especially social housing.
- Raise standards in private rental housing.
- Reduce exposure and availability of tobacco and vapes by licensing retailers, and extend smoke-free zones.
- Make healthier food and drink the affordable, visible options in shops and restaurants, and restrict price promotions for less healthy food and drinks

4. Care tailored to local need builds health and resilience

Addressing the root causes of poor health—not just the consequences—means everyone in Wales can prosper and enjoy better health and wellbeing and our health system is resilient.

Policies need to address the needs of local people through earlier intervention and delivery of joined-up, effective care for the whole person when and where people need it.

- Increase the yearly share of the NHS budget spent on prevention and primary and community care instead of hospital treatment.
- Join up health and community care with public services and voluntary organisations to support the whole person.
- Invest in community health facilities, skilled staff, data and digital tools that link with health records to support early and preventative care.

5. A healthy planet protects our people now and in the future

The health of people and the planet are interconnected. Many actions that address climate change also support longer, healthier lives.

Policies need to focus on both preventing the health harms of climate change and tackling its root causes, especially for those most vulnerable and least able to adapt.

- Invest in safe walking and cycling routes, footpaths, and car-free town centres.

-
- Make public transport accessible and affordable, including free bus travel for young people.
 - Protect communities from the health harms of climate change by tackling flooding, improving food security, ensuring sufficient and quality water for private supply, and expanding access to green spaces and tree cover

At Public Health Wales we welcome the opportunity to engage further with the Committee to inform the development of its Legacy Report, and we look forward to ongoing, constructive engagement with your successor Committee. If you would like more detailed information in relation to the specific interventions to tackle these five areas then please do not hesitate to contact us. I have also attached the infographics for the summary and solutions for the priority areas for information.

Yours sincerely,



Tracey Cooper
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Working Together for a Healthier Wales: Get to Know Us

Who we are, what we do, why it matters.

Who we are

Everyone in Wales deserves the chance to live a healthy life. That's what we work for every day.

Public Health Wales is the national public health organisation for Wales. We exist to help all people in Wales live longer, healthier lives.

With our partners, we aim to increase healthy life expectancy, improve health and wellbeing, and reduce inequalities for everyone in Wales, now and for future generations.

**Prevent
disease**



**Protect
health**



**Improve
wellbeing**



**Reduce health
inequalities**



What we do

We play a unique and vital role in population health by focussing on prevention and supporting healthcare.

We deliver national services, such as screening, vaccination, and public health protection programmes, to help people stay healthier for longer.

We also address the full range of issues that shape health. From preventing disease and protecting against threats, to reducing inequalities and shaping the conditions that support wellbeing.

As Wales's national public health organisation, we lead long-term prevention and population health efforts, working with partners across the country to help create healthy and prosperous communities.

Our goal is a Wales where everyone can live longer, healthier lives with fair and equal access to the things that support good health and wellbeing.

Our work covers:

Health Protection and Infection

Diagnosing, treating and controlling infectious diseases, environmental threats and public health emergencies.

Policy and Partnerships

Advising and supporting government and partners with trusted, expert public health insight.

Screening Services

Detecting conditions like cancer and newborn disorders early through national screening programmes.

Health Improvement

Supporting ways of living that improve health, from reducing smoking and substance use to better nutrition, physical activity, and mental wellbeing.

Research and Innovation

Improving health outcomes through evidence-based change and new ideas.

Surveillance and Intelligence

Turning data into actionable insights to inform decisions and raise awareness.

Why it matters

Not everyone in Wales has the same chance to live a healthy life.

Health isn't just about healthcare. Housing, education, jobs, income, and the environment all affect how long and well we live. That's why we work across sectors to put health at the heart of decisions about Wales's future.

By bringing evidence, partnership, and innovation together, we help to create the conditions for people and communities across Wales to thrive.

We are Public Health Wales.
Working together for a healthier Wales.

Working together for a healthier Wales: A summary

Longer, healthier lives and a fairer, more prosperous Wales - practical actions to make a difference.



The best start in life builds lifelong health and wellbeing

We need to prioritise the health and wellbeing of babies, children and young people so they can thrive today and shape resilient communities tomorrow.

This means families have access to the right support, safe places to play, and nurturing care. Children are protected from harm, including poverty and adverse childhood experiences, so they can grow up strong and healthy.



Financial wellbeing drives better health and a prosperous economy

We need to support more people to stay healthy and in work, and improve financial security so families can live well.

This means access to fair, secure jobs that pay a living wage, affordable childcare for working parents, and support for people with health issues to stay in or return to work. When families can afford essentials like healthy food and social connection, they stay healthier, and local economies benefit.



Healthy lives start in our everyday places

We need to make homes, shops, and public spaces healthier so it's easier for people to live well and avoid harmful habits.

This means healthy homes and food are affordable and accessible, and tobacco and vaping products are less visible, less appealing, and not seen as a normal part of daily life.



Care tailored to local need builds health and resilience

We need to strengthen primary and community care to prevent illness, respond early, and better meet the needs of supporting those with long term conditions.

This means services have the resources and staff to provide timely care that supports all aspects of people's wellbeing, close to home and when it's needed most.



A healthy planet protects our people now and in the future

We need to protect people and communities from the health risks of climate change and environmental harm.

This means clean air and water, access to healthy food and health services that can withstand extreme weather and disease. Pollution and environmental risks must be reduced to protect lives and mental wellbeing.

Working together for a healthier Wales: How we make change happen

Longer, healthier lives and a fairer, more prosperous Wales - practical actions to make a difference.



The best start in life builds lifelong health and wellbeing

The foundation for a life lived in good health is built in our early years.

- Consider children's wellbeing in all policy decisions.
- Deliver the Best Start in Life framework through cross-government leadership.
- Ensure comprehensive child health data to guide policy, target support, and track outcomes for babies and young children.
- Ensure every family can easily access Health Visitor support, and provide Flying Start based on need, not postcode.
- Embed trauma and adverse childhood experience-informed approaches from pre-pregnancy onwards.



Financial wellbeing drives better health and a prosperous economy

Secure and fairly rewarded work that pays a living wage is good for our health.

- Ensure public bodies provide safe, secure jobs paying at least the Real Living Wage.
- Monitor progress on workplace equality, including gender, ethnicity, and disability pay gaps.
- Support people with health challenges to enter, stay in, or return to work.
- Link employment services with health support especially for those with long-term or mental health conditions so people get help when they need it.



Healthy lives start in our everyday places

When the places where we live, eat, shop, and play are healthy, it is easier for all of us to live healthier and happier lives.

- Increase the availability of healthy and affordable homes, especially social housing.
- Raise standards in private rental housing.
- Reduce exposure and availability of tobacco and vapes by licensing retailers, and extend smoke-free zones.
- Make healthier food and drink the affordable, visible options in shops and restaurants, and restrict price promotions for less healthy food and drinks.



Care tailored to local need builds health and resilience

Addressing the root causes of poor health - not just the consequences - means everyone in Wales can prosper and enjoy better health and wellbeing and our health system is resilient.

- Increase the yearly share of the NHS budget spent on prevention and primary and community care instead of hospital treatment.
- Join up health and community care with public services and voluntary organisations to support the whole person.
- Invest in community health facilities, skilled staff, data and digital tools that link with health records to support early and preventative care.



A healthy planet protects our people now and in the future

The health of people and the planet are interconnected. Many actions that address climate change also support longer, healthier lives.

- Invest in safe walking and cycling routes, footpaths, and car-free town centres.
- Make public transport accessible and affordable, including free bus travel for young people.
- Protect communities from the health harms of climate change by tackling flooding, improving food security, ensuring sufficient and quality water for private supply, and expanding access to green spaces and tree cover.

Action across these five areas will help build a healthier, fairer and more prosperous Wales for the future and support a strong sustainable health and care system



Welsh Government response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee (CYPE)

Report of the Welsh Government Draft
Budget 2026-27

Summary

This report sets out the Welsh Government response to the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee's Report on the Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026-27.

It provides responses to the 10 recommendations made in the Committee's Report.

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1. Introduction

The Welsh Government Draft Budget for 2026-27 was published in two stages. The outline draft budget 2026-27 was published on 14 October 2025 with the detailed draft budget 2026-27 published on 3 November 2025. It set out revenue and capital spending plans for the period April 2026 to March 2027.

As part of the budgetary process written evidence was provided by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Minister for Further and Higher Education in relation to budgets within the Education MEG and the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Minister for Children and Social Care and Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing in relation to budgets in the Health and Social Care MEG to inform scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2026-27. These papers provided information to the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee on budget allocations.

Oral evidence sessions were held on the 19 and 27 November 2025 where the CYPE Committee took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education; Minister for Further and Higher Education; Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care; Minister for Children and Social Care; and Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

The Committee published its report on [Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026-27](#) on 15 December. We thank the Committee for the report.

The Welsh Government has considered the Committee's report and responds to the recommendations below.

2. Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment and Children's Rights Impact Assessment

Recommendation 1

The Welsh Government shares with the Senedd as a matter of priority the outcomes of the further impact analysis which is being used to inform budget decisions. At the latest this should be provided before the publication of the Final Budget.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment (SIIA) is the tool the Welsh Government uses to assess the impact of our spending decisions and is an iterative process that begins in the Spring when Cabinet considers the budget strategy for the following year and continues throughout the budget cycle.

This year, we published an interim SIIA at Draft Budget which provided an impact assessment of the decisions taken in preparing the Draft Budget. In that report, we set out the improvements being made to the SIIA this year, including our intention to publish a further assessment at the Final Budget, which for the first time will ensure all considerations of impact throughout the budget cycle are published to improve transparency.

Since the Draft Budget we have undertaken further analysis of evidence and have held targeted, in depth discussions across Welsh Government departments to provide a deeper consideration of cross cutting impacts. These were held in identified focus areas, including children's rights, Welsh language, equality, socio-economic disadvantage, and preventative spending to inform the decisions being taken at Final Budget. That analysis is set out in the Final SIIA published at Final Budget on 20 January.

Recommendation 2

The Welsh Government must produce and publish a standalone Children's Rights Impact Assessment of its Draft Budget 2027-28 to demonstrate its compliance with the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, as set out in the Welsh Government's own Children's Rights Scheme.

Response: Reject

The Welsh Government undertakes and produces a SIIA of the Draft and Final Budgets, which considers the cumulative and cross cutting impacts of budgetary decisions made by Cabinet. This does not replace or duplicate the individual impact assessments which the Welsh Government is committed to undertaking on individual policy and spending decisions.

The Welsh Government's Children's Rights Scheme sets out that Children's Rights Impact Assessments must be carried out as part of the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process. These IIAs are carried out at an early stage when policies and programmes are being developed. We remain of the view that this is the right place in which to consider the detailed impact of our policies on the rights of children. However, the SIIA does include consideration of the Budget's impact on children at a strategic level to ensure that we meet our statutory duties. This position will of course be kept under review.

3. Health and Social Care

Recommendation 3

The Welsh Government should set out the key measures that best show improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing. These indicators should be accompanied by an explanation of how they inform budget decisions and how they ensure that outcomes, rather than just activities, are being effectively managed and delivered.

Response: Agree in Principle

We use a range of measures to monitor children's health and well-being outcomes, which are aligned to our overarching policy priorities and strategic objectives for health and social care.

Funding for children's health service is included within Health Boards' overall allocations. It is the responsibility of Health Boards to plan and commission services that meet the needs of their local populations, including children and young people, through their statutory planning processes.

We are working with the National Strategic Clinical Network for Child Health to develop an Integrated Quality Statement (IQS) for Children's Health. The IQS will act as a quality improvement tool for healthcare services, setting out clear, measurable standards that Health Boards and Trusts should apply across all primary, secondary, and tertiary care settings. Its purpose is to drive consistency, accountability, and continuous improvement in care for babies, children, and young people, with a strong emphasis on prevention and early intervention to reduce avoidable harm and promote lifelong health and well-being.

Following publication of the IQS, Health Boards will be required to align their planning and delivery (within IMTPs and quality reporting) to these expectations.

Recommendation 4

Before the vote on the Final Budget, the Welsh Government provides more information on how the budget allocations will specifically deliver its policy objectives in relation to:

- Safeguarding children and the children's statutory social care workforce;
- Supporting local authorities with the escalating placement costs prior to the full commencement of the law on restricting profit from children's care;
- Its commitment to expand Flying Start childcare to all two-year olds, as opposed to the current 66 per cent;
- Paediatric waiting times;
- Developing a sustainable child health workforce;
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and wider mental health support for children and young people;
- Neurodevelopmental services and in particular work to reduce the waiting times for assessment.
- Designed to Smile.

This should also include information on how they will monitor the outcomes from this expenditure and assess if it is delivering on the policy intent.

Response: Accept

Safeguarding children and the children's statutory social care workforce

Welsh Government is investing in key areas to strengthen the social care workforce, including statutory children's services. Our aim is to attract more people to this vital sector and help ease the recruitment and retention pressures currently faced. These investments include:

- Student Social Worker Bursary – Maintaining our commitment to the enhanced bursary, providing £1.4m annually to make the social work degree more financially accessible and attractive to new entrants.
- Social Care Wales Workforce Development Programme (SCWWDP) – Through our funding to Social Care Wales, £13m is available to support a wide range of training opportunities, including the 'grow your own' social worker programme. Local Authority

'Grow Your Own' Schemes are supporting paid employment and funded social work training, alongside developing communities of practice and delivering training and development opportunities across the sector.

- Workforce and Sustainable Social Services Grant – Continuing our commitment to provide £45m to all 22 local authorities, this recurrent funding supports pay increases and other measures to strengthen service delivery and meet rising demand.

Supporting local authorities with the escalating placement costs prior to the full commencement of the law on restricting profit from children's care

The Eliminate and Radical Reform grant has provided £69.6m over the last three years to enable local authorities and regions to support the planning and development of services that will give them more control of placements. This includes developing new in-house provision alongside engaging with other not-for-profit providers. Developing these services will help offset rising costs associated with some for-profit provision and support authorities stabilise placements while preparing for and implementing the legislative changes. Going forward, the grant is maintained at, up to £25m per annum for 2026-27.

More broadly the grant funding allocated to the Association of Directors of Social Services Cymru (ADSS Cymru) has supported local authority planning at a national level including the planning of new services to mitigate increases in placement costs.

Regarding monitoring outcomes from the funding this is done via both formal grant monitoring processes alongside close working with local authorities via the various programme governance structures including the Eliminating Profit Programme Board and the underpinning Workstream 1 which focuses on expanding and developing new local authority and regional provision. In addition, Welsh Government has published two progress reports on the transition to a not-for-profit model. These include detailed data on registered services, places and households, broken down by local authority and regional partnership board areas.

Its commitment to expand Flying Start childcare to all two-year olds, as opposed to the current 66 per cent

Capacity constraints in the sector and the need for further funding means that it has been recognised since 2023 that the Programme for Government commitment to reach all 2-year-olds with funded childcare would not be completed by the end of this Senedd term.

Despite this, the expansion programme has been making significant progress during the current financial year. Two local authorities (Swansea and Merthyr) have now completed the rollout of Flying Start childcare, meaning that all 2-year-olds in their area will be able to access high quality Flying Start childcare provision.

The Final Budget maintains the current funding allocation for the Flying Start childcare Expansion Programme in the Children & Communities Grant. This will be over £222m in 2026-27.

Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services and wider mental health support for children and young people

We continue to protect mental health services and in 2026/27 the health board ring fence for mental health is over £863m. This includes child and adolescent services. Health boards are expected to align their activity with the 'all age' Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and associated delivery plan published in April 2025. This includes transforming our mental health services to provide same-day access to support, enabling people get the right support at the right time. An update on the implementation of the first year of this strategy will be published in May 2026.

Designed to Smile

There is increasing evidence that children who are decay-free by the age of five will have far less decay throughout their lifetime than children who have decay before the age of five.

This shows that prevention is the key to improving children's oral health and will require a multi-faceted approach that is wider than just attending check-ups at particular intervals.

The Designed to Smile (D2S) programme is our key national programme in this space and aims to reduce oral health inequalities in Wales by targeting children in deprived communities with free, evidence-based prevention measures such as supervised toothbrushing, fluoride varnish, and education, ensuring that those most at risk of poor oral health receive early and consistent support. Schools and nurseries are selected based on Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) data.

£4m per annum is provided for the D2S programme and this is a ringfenced allocation within health boards' primary care dental budget. Activity and expenditure is measured through an annual report produced by Public Health Wales and outcomes for children are measured through the epidemiology studies that are carried out to assess prevalence and severity of dental caries (tooth decay) in 5 year old and 12 year old children - Dental Epidemiology Programme for Wales - Public Health Wales.

Waiting times

Reducing all long waits over 2 years regardless of age is a top priority, in 2025-26 this priority has been supported by the additional £120m. We have seen significant reduction of waits for children over 2- years. The October 2025 position shows a reduction of 90% from April 2022 numbers.

Each health board have shown reduction with Powys and Swansea Bay having none. Cwm Taff Morgannwg and Hywel Dda UHBs having less than 20. While Betsi Cadwaladr has shown a 72.5% reduction in October 2025 compared to April 2022 position, they currently account for nearly 65% of all the over two-year waits. Specific support through special care measures is being provided to BCU to address all their long waits including children's, the main challenges being ENT and orthodontics.

The Child Health network has indicated several specific actions it wants to work with health boards and the planned care programme to address and support the focus to address long waits, by working differently. One of the actions is the need to explore possible new targets for children's waits based on clinical need and assessment of wider assessment of harm. In 2025 shorter waits for audiology pathways have already been established for children compared to adult pathways.

Implementation of any recommendations from this work would be for the new government to consider and approve.

Developing a sustainable child health workforce

- Budget allocations continue to prioritise investment in Wales's paediatric workforce
- The NHS now employs a record of number of staff, including a 48% increase in paediatric consultants over the past decade
- Targeted funding enabled sustained expansion of paediatric training capacity, with 18 new training posts added since 2020.
- This pipeline will strengthen consultant availability across Wales and support improved access to high-quality care for children and young people.

Safeguarding Children

The Safeguarding and Advocacy branch budget includes the following agreed funding for 2026-2027:

- £550k to support the 'Active Offer' of advocacy for children and young people
- £12k to Tros Gynnal Plant to support the maintenance of a data set for the Active Officer of advocacy
- £527k MEIC helpline and advocacy service for children
- £72k to support Regional Safeguarding Boards to deliver multi-agency safeguarding training to professionals
- A further £12k to support Regional Safeguarding Boards to deliver activities in Safeguarding Week
- £50k to support the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board to develop and maintain the procedures and All Wales Practice Guides
- £108k to NSPCC Childline
- £25k to explore the imposition of individual mandatory reporting duties
- £50k to develop and implement the National Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse
- £75k to deliver a national awareness raising campaign about child sexual abuse
- £200k to support the maintenance and work of the National Independent Safeguarding Board

Additionally, via the Third Sector Grant:

- £190k to Lucy Faithfull Foundation to deliver two projects to children and their families who have been affected by child sexual abuse

Key priorities for 2026-2027

- Establish the delivery structure required to deliver the National Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse (2026-2036)
- Begin to implement the Delivery Plan for the National Strategy (2026-2029)

Neurodivergence

Eliminating three-year waits for children's neurodevelopmental assessments:

- Welsh Government eliminated four-year waits following a targeted £3m investment in 2024/25 which demonstrated the capacity for rapid, effective change. £5.6m has been allocated for 2025–26, explicitly aimed at eradicating all three-year wait times by March 2026 for children's neurodevelopment assessments. Currently, despite some issues around procuring private assessments in three health boards, all seven are on target to meet their agreed trajectories and to eliminate three-year waits, well as those health boards on target to eliminate those over two-years.
- An options paper to consider the funding allocation of £5.6m for 2026/27 is being prepared to ensure that the momentum is maintained alongside challenging other health boards to move towards eliminating over two year waits for

Economic & Efficiency Gains

- Early diagnosis reduces future costs by enabling targeted interventions earlier, helping children reach developmental milestones and potentially lowering demand on corrective services
- Health boards are already transforming pathways so that they are leaner, finding efficiencies in the system and additional funding.

Impact on Children & Families

- Protracted delays in diagnosis and intervention adversely affect early learning, emotional development, and social inclusion; eliminating long waits ensures that the aim that children receive support when it matters most is achieved.
- Parents and carers having to endure times of uncertainty report experiencing stress and isolation; timely assessments foster peace of mind and connection to services. Two current Sustainable Social Services Third Sector Grant recipients: National Autistic Society (£67,000) and Autism Spectrum Connections Cymru (£300,000) have been asked to move towards providing pre and post diagnosis family support as the Grant rolls over until March 2027.
- Engaging with children and young people: Children Wales have been commissioned to engage with children and young people who are neurodivergent on a range of ND subject related areas including as part of the consultation on the Neurodivergence Code of Practice, so that their voices and lived experiences can directly shape policy and NDIP delivery.

Digital Enablers to support/improve ND assessments and services

- Some regions have already gone much further and faster, with AI a key feature.
- An AI Scribe pilot using 'Magic Notes' in CTMUHB (supported by the Centre for Public Digital Services) has recently concluded which has been used in children's neurodevelopmental assessments. 'Magic Notes Scribe,' originally developed to generate assessments in social care contexts, records an assessment in real time and is able to use the recording and other reports to produce a detailed assessment.
- The pilot is part of a broader drive to improve the neurodevelopmental pathway in Wales by reducing the administrative burden, shortening waiting times, and delivering better outcomes for children and families. A second pilot in HDUHB is about to commence to compare the data and experience.

Augmentative and Alterative Communication Aids (e.g. PECS, Joyreal, Dynavox): Research in Practice Project Placement

- A scoping review, led by a PhD student from Bangor University, will be funded to explore the use of and benefits of Augmentative and Alterative Communication Aids (AAC), especially digital based aids such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) which are designed to help individuals with speech, language and communication difficulties and who are non-verbal to express themselves; promoting independence, social interaction and inclusion. Work will commence in March for 12-weeks.

Recommendation 5

That the Welsh Government identifies the areas within Children's Health where service transformation is needed to improve service quality, reduce waiting times, generate service efficiencies and improve outcomes. This should include an explanation of how these priorities align with the wider NHS transformation programme.

Response: Agree in Principle

The Integrated Quality Statement (IQS) for Children's Health will set out clear, measurable standards for children's services, and provide a framework to support health boards in prioritising improvements in quality and access. It will also support health boards to identify where transformation is required and ensure these priorities align with the broader NHS transformation agenda.

We continue to work closely with the National Strategic Clinical Network for Child Health to identify service areas where change is most needed, for example, improving transition and handover between children's and adult services.

Recommendation 6

In providing the information outlined in Recommendation 5, the Welsh Government should identify clearly and concisely the service areas which require additional financial investment to support service transformation. This should include details of the level of financial investment needed, and the expected timeframe for achieving a sustainable funding position. In doing this, we would like clear information on the impact for children and young people accessing or seeking to access these services, and how outcomes will be measured.

Response: Agree in Principle

The Integrated Quality Statement (IQS) for Children's Health is the first step in identifying transformation priorities, which will surface the investment requirements and timeframes for achieving the transformation outcomes, how they will be measures and sustainable financial arrangements. This information will be used to develop options and advice for the next Government.

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government provides an update on the outcomes from the meeting between the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care and the Cabinet Secretary for Education on the health and education interface and support for ALN. This update should include information on any of the budgetary, policy or cultural issues that are now being dealt with as a result of the discussions.

Response: Accept

Two discussions have taken place between the Cabinet Secretary for Education, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, and the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing. They have sought to understand the challenges and barriers to integration, and the sector insights surfaced through the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Legislative review and ALN evaluation. During the meetings, Cabinet Secretaries agreed a number of key actions.

Importantly, they agreed a joint commitment to multi-agency integration and collaboration to meet the health, social care and education needs of children and young people with ALN which was communicated by the Cabinet Secretary for Education in an [oral statement](#) on ALN Reforms.

Constructive work is underway at an Official level to take forward the below actions:

- Work to embed children and young people with health needs and/or ALN in Regional Partnership Boards priorities planning and commissioning, including the development of a joint communication across health, social care and education to improve multiagency integrated planning, building on a joint spotlight event held in December 2025.
- Strengthen area-based planning by improving population-level data sharing between schools, local authorities and health boards on children and young people with healthcare needs and/or ALN to inform demand and capacity planning.
- Appointing an NHS based professional advisor for multiagency collaboration to drive improvements in system integration and planning, develop shared delivery expectations, and key performance indicators so responsibilities and timescales are transparent.
- Develop a clear health policy statement to inform the co-production of new multi-agency ALNET guidance with delivery partners to provide clarity and consistency of practice and align expectations between health and education settings.
- Improving clarity of roles and responsibilities for all those involved in supporting learners with healthcare needs by reviewing and updating the *Supporting Learners with Healthcare Needs* guidance, and ensuring alignment with other relevant frameworks and guidance, including the *School Nursing Frameworks* and the

Children and Young People's Continuing Care guidance. This work will take account of changing learner demographics, reinforce roles and responsibilities across sectors to align expectations among local health boards, local authorities, schools, and children, young people, and their parents/carers to promote effective and consistent, high-quality practice in meeting learners' needs.

- Exploring opportunities to further align policy on transforming the system to be needs-led and inclusive, particularly in relation to neurodivergence.

Further meetings will be held on a bi-annual basis, where these actions will be kept under review.

4. Education

Recommendation 8

The Welsh Government should ensure that an amount of sufficient resources are directed to local authorities, and support local authorities to ensure that they are able to direct some of this additional funding to schools.

Response: Accept

The Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government published the final local government settlement on 20 January. As a result of the budget agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, which includes an additional £112.8m to support local government, core revenue funding for local authorities in the final settlement will increase by 4.5% on a like-for-like basis when compared to 2025-26, with no authority receiving an increase of less than 4%.

Local authority funding is un-hypothecated and therefore down to local decision making to determine priorities. However, we have reiterated and emphasised to local authorities our joint priorities which includes education, and the funding of schools, through the funding letter to local authority leaders of 20 January. The letter recognises the valuable opportunity local authorities have to allocate resources to schools, to focus on key pressures of ALN, school transport, workforce and workload.

Recommendation 9

Ahead of publication of the Final Budget, the Welsh Government should set out details of all the consequential funding resulting from the UK Government's Spending Review in June and its Autumn Budget, where this funding will be allocated and provide clear reasons for these decisions. If money is going to the Local Government Revenue Support Grant, the Welsh Government should set out what it would like to see that funding used for or at least what it is notionally allocated for, while respecting that those are ultimately decisions for local authorities. The Welsh Government should also explain any instances where consequential funding is allocated to different areas than those for which it is a consequential.

Response: Accept in Principle

The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language wrote to the Finance Committee on 5 August 2025 to provide details of the consequential funding resulting from the UK Government's Spending Review on 11 June 2025, and on 15 January to provide details of consequential funding from the Autumn Budget.

Consequential funding from the UK Government forms part of the total block grant provided to Wales. Decisions about how money is spent in Wales are made collectively by the Cabinet, based on Wales' needs and our priorities. Decisions around how the block grant, which includes consequential funding, are taken as part of the budget setting process. These decisions are explained in the budgetary documentation published as part of the Draft and Final Budget and are subject to a full scrutiny process by the Senedd. Consequential funding is not routinely passed on to replicate decisions taken by the UK Government for England. Where there is a case for consequential funding to be spent in the same area, Ministers will consider as part of the budgetary process.

The funding we provide to Local Government through the Revenue Support Grant is un-hypothecated. Where appropriate, the local government settlement letter sets out the context of our decisions and therefore our expectations of local authorities. As set out in the response to recommendation 8, the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government's letter to local authority leaders of 20 January acknowledges that the additional £112.8m being provided to local authorities in Final Budget will help protect core frontline public services, particularly those key sectors facing increasing demands such as Education and Social Care. Given that local authority funding accounts for over 80% of education funding, the 4.5% increase in the local government settlement offers an opportunity for local authorities to allocate significant resources to their schools, to focus on the key pressures of Additional Learning Needs (ALN), school transport, workforce, and

workload. The additional funding will also support the continuing delivery of essential social services for both children and adults.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Government provide more information on the reasons for the £1.97 million funding for conservatoire provision, including whether this decision was made by the Welsh Government or Medr, what the funding will deliver and how this links to the Welsh Government's priorities.

Response: Accept in Principle

The allocation to Medr for conservatoire provision is funded from the Support for Local Culture and Sport BEL within the Economy, Energy and Planning MEG, which is the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership.

We refer the Committee to the [Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee report on the Scrutiny of the Welsh Government Draft Budget 2026-27](#) and the Welsh Government's response to recommendation 8, which provides further detail on the £1.97m allocation to Medr to support performance-based music and drama conservatoire provision.

Agenda Item 3.6

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau

Petitions Committee

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CC: Buffy Williams MS, Children, Young People and Education
Committee

27 January 2026

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Petition P-06-1540 Remove The Manipulative Funding System Forcing Students To Do Welsh Baccalaureate

The Petitions Committee met on 12 January and considered the above petition, submitted by Ioan Armstrong.

The Committee agreed to write to you to set out the petitioners' questions, and to copy this correspondence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee for awareness.

Members agreed to keep the petition open pending your response, but noted the limited time remaining in the current Senedd term would prevent further action on the petition beyond this.

The full details of the Committee's consideration of the petition, including the correspondence and the actions agreed by the Committee can be found here: [P-06-1540 Remove The Manipulative Funding System Forcing Students To Do Welsh Baccalaureate](#)

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

Yours sincerely



Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair

Agenda Item 3.7

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau Petitions Committee

Buffy Williams MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

27 January 2026

Dear Buffy,

Petition P-06-1532 Early Expert Input and Safeguarding Reform for Children with Additional Learning Needs in Wales

The Petitions Committee met on 12 January and considered the above petition, submitted by Rachael Walkingshaw-McGuinness.

The Committee agreed to draw the petitioners' comments to your attention as Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, as part of its ongoing scrutiny of the ALN reforms. In light of this, the Committee agreed to close the petition.

The full details of the Committee's consideration of the petition, including the correspondence and the actions agreed by the Committee can be found here: [P-06-1532 Early Expert Input and Safeguarding Reform for Children with Additional Learning Needs in Wales](#)

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

Yours sincerely



Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair

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Agenda Item 7

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