

# Agenda – Children, Young People, and Education Committee

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Meeting Venue:

Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel  
and video conference via Zoom

Meeting date: 11 March 2026

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Naomi Stocks

Committee Clerk

0300 200 6565

[SeneddChildren@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddChildren@senedd.wales)

## Hybrid

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### Private pre-meeting

09.15 – 09.30

### Public meeting

09.30 – 11.30

### 1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.30

### 2 Scrutiny of Estyn Annual Report 2024 – 2025

09.30 – 11.30

(Pages 1 – 31)

Owen Evans, His Majesty's chief inspector, Estyn

Claire Morgan, Strategic Director, Estyn

Jassa Scott, Strategic Director, Estyn

Liz Miles, Assistant Director, Estyn

[Annual Report – Estyn](#)

Attached Documents:

Research brief

### 3 Papers to note

11.30



### **3.1 Forward work programme**

(Pages 32 – 67)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of Children, Young People and Education Committee from Head of Wales, Equality and Human Rights Commission

### **3.2 Forward work programme**

(Pages 68 – 69)

Attached Documents:

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

### **3.3 Forward work programme**

(Pages 70 – 80)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Chief Inspector of Care Inspectorate Wales

### **3.4 Forward work programme**

(Page 81)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Literacy Expert Panel

### **3.5 General scrutiny of the Cabinet Secretary for Education**

(Pages 82 – 86)

Attached Documents:

Additional information from the Welsh Government following the scrutiny session on 4 February

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

11.30

## **Break**

11.30 – 11.40

## **5 Scrutiny of Estyn Annual Report 2024 – 2025 – consideration of the evidence**

11.40 – 11.55

## **6 Consideration of the Committee's Legacy report**

11.55 – 12.30

(Pages 87 – 108)

Attached Documents:

Draft Report

Document is Restricted

# Agenda Item 3.1



Comisiwn  
Cydraddoldeb a  
Hawliau Dynol

Equality and  
Human Rights  
Commission

Children, Young People and  
Education Committee  
Senedd Cymru

Via email only

Friday 27 February 2026

Dear Chair,

## **Subject: Wales Impact Reports and Legacy Report**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is Britain's equality and human rights regulator for Great Britain and an 'A' status National Human Rights Institution for Wales and England, and for reserved matters in Scotland.

We have worked closely with the Children, Young People and Education Committee during the Sixth Senedd and thought we would support your legacy reporting by linking you to our Wales Impact Reports.

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Bydd y Comisiwn yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg.

The Commission welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English.

**Ff/T:** 029 2044 7710

**E:** [correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:correspondence@equalityhumanrights.com)

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[Wales Impact Report 2024 to 2025 | EHRC](#)

[Wales Impact Report 2023 to 2024 | EHRC](#)

[Wales Impact Report 2022 to 2023 | EHRC](#)

[Wales Impact Report 2020 to 2021 | EHRC](#)

Some examples, relevant to the work of the Committee, in our Impact Reports include:

- Our [evidence and recommendations](#) to the Committee were strongly reflected in your report and inquiry on access to education for disabled children and implementation of reforms. Our advice to the Committee in advance ensured the inquiry used the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as a frame of reference.
- The Committee's consultation report on peer-on-peer sexual harassment in schools reflected our evidence and recommendations. This included the need to update statutory guidance to local authorities on data collection

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and analysis.

## Monitoring Welsh Government progress towards its international human rights obligations

Our [Human Rights Tracker](#) is an online tool that monitors how effectively the Welsh and UK governments are meeting their human rights obligations. It currently contains more than 70 assessments of the Welsh Government's actions in response to recommendations issued by UN Human Rights Committees. We believe this evidence base is a valuable resource for informing the Committee's legacy report, providing an up-to-date picture of the state of human rights in Wales across a broad range of thematic areas.

Our briefing, [Monitoring Welsh Government progress towards its international human rights obligations](#), provides the background and information regarding monitoring processes. This briefing introduces the process for monitoring compliance with international UN treaties which will be useful for future Committees

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## **Additional Information : Briefing - Equality and human rights in Wales.**

This briefing provides a robust evidence-based snapshot of the most pressing equality and human rights issues in Wales, taken from our state of the nation [Is Wales Fairer? 2023](#) report. This highlights what has been achieved during the Sixth Senedd, in addition to the equality and human rights issues that will need to be addressed during the next Senedd.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Children, Young People and Education Committee for your work during the Sixth Senedd. If there is anything you would like us to clarify, or would like any further information, please let us know.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Coombs  
Head of Wales

**Direct telephone:** 029 2044 7710

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Briefing

# Equality and human rights in Wales

August 2025

EHRC Wales

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# Introduction

## Who we are

The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the equality regulator for Great Britain and the National Human Rights Institution for Wales and England, and for reserved matters in Scotland. We have a statutory mandate to advise the Welsh Government and the Senedd on matters relating to equality and human rights.

The Equality Act 2006 places duties on the Commission to provide advice to governments on equality and human rights enactments.<sup>1</sup> Find out more about the Commission's work on our [website](#).

As an A-status National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) we are assessed against the [Paris Principles](#). The Commission was last re-accredited as an A-status NHRI in May 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> [Equality Act 2006](#), section 11 [accessed 22 November 2024]

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# About this briefing

## Purpose

This briefing provides a robust evidence-based snapshot of the most pressing equality and human rights issues in Wales today. It will help prospective candidates and political parties understand the challenges ahead as they prepare themselves for the election and the new Senedd term, and develop their own plans for 2026 and beyond.

It provides a summary of some key aspects of our Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Wales Fairer? 2023, set out in the key domains of life. This overview draws on data to measure progress on equality and human rights in Wales. It is intended to support evidence-based decisions.

Our aim is to drive action and meaningful change, to make life fairer for everyone.

## Approach taken

The evidence for this briefing has been taken from our Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Wales Fairer? 2023. Where specific Welsh evidence is not available, for example where data are missing or are not sufficiently disaggregated, we have used relevant evidence from our Great Britain report “Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023”.

The Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023 is our state of the nation review for Britain. How we assess equality and human rights for this review is set out in our [Measurement Framework](#). This explains how we examined different areas of life, which we call domains. This briefing captures our findings for the key domains of interest to candidates and political parties ahead of the next Senedd.

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You can read further detailed analysis in the [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer?](#) and the [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023](#).

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# Cross cutting/framework

## Summary

This chapter reports on important overarching findings on equality and human rights in Wales that are not necessarily related to a specific protected characteristic and / or domain.<sup>2</sup> Data and evidence gaps in Wales limit our ability to undertake a comprehensive assessment of progress of equality and human rights in Wales.

Data gaps exist across all protected characteristics and there is a lack of disaggregated data by protected characteristic across policy areas that would strengthen evidence-based policy and decision making. Data collection methods should allow for intersectionality and include both qualitative and quantitative methods.

It is imperative that data and evidence gaps continue to be filled to gain a clearer national, regional and sectoral understanding of equality and human rights issues in Wales. Such evidence is also critical to better understand the impacts of both COVID-19 and increases in the cost of living.

## Key findings

The proportion of Welsh residents aged three or over that had any skills in Welsh decreased slightly from 2011 to 2021, as did the proportion who reported being able to speak Welsh. (The number of Welsh residents born outside the UK has increased by 28.3% since 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> The domains we use are outlined in our measurement framework (EHRC, 2017)

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A smaller proportion of children who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) achieved 5 GCSEs grade A\*-C (52.5%) in 2020/21 compared to those who are not eligible (79.8%). The attainment gap has not changed since the last report and remains higher than the gap in England.

In 2021/22, 57.2% of people in Wales aged 16 and over were in employment. However, pre-pandemic employment growth has stagnated since our last statutory review, with gains in employment tailing off.

In Wales adult and child poverty rates have been variable. It is too soon for the data to show the full effect of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis but in 2020/22 over one-in-five people (adults and children), and over one-in-four children, were living in relative income poverty.

Between 2020 and 2022 the number of families in temporary accommodation nearly doubled in Wales from 2,324 to 4,465 households.

Life expectancy at birth estimates for Wales suggest that improvements in life expectancy have been slowing, with suggestions that COVID-19 mortality contributed to a drop in life expectancy in the most recent figures. Average life expectancy in Wales is lower than England but higher than Scotland.

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# Education

## What has improved?

Between 2018/19 and 2020/21, attainment at GCSE for pupils with a disability / Special Education Need (SEN) improved at a higher rate than for those without a disability / SEN. However, there remains a large gap between the two groups.

Ethnic minority pupils consistently achieve higher rates of attainment at GCSE than White British children, a difference that has increased slightly since 2015/16. However, there are variations in attainment between ethnicities.

Between 2012 and 2017, in early years' development, the attainment gap reduced between those eligible for FSM and those who are not eligible. The early years' attainment gap between those eligible for FSM and those who are not narrowed from 21.4 percentage points to 17.0 percentage points for boys and from 15.3 percentage points to 11.5 percentage points for girls.

There has been an increase in the proportion of Christians and those with No Religion obtaining a degree, from 22.9% and 23.7% respectively in 2012/13 to 32.3% and 31.0% in 2021/22. Despite this, they remain the religious groups least likely to have a degree.

Analysis of Annual Population Survey (APS) data on Wales found people aged 55–64 are least likely to have done any learning activity in the previous three months. However, the number of people of this age who participate in learning activities has steadily grown between 2010/11 (12.6%) and 2021/22 (16.6%).

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## What has got worse?

In early years attainment, children with a disability / SEN in Wales are falling behind children without a disability / SEN at a faster rate than in England or Scotland.

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children experienced large drops in early years development decreasing from 56.2% in 2016/17 to 48.8% in 2018/19.

Permanent and fixed school exclusion rates have been rising, and rates remain significantly higher for boys than for girls.

There was an increase of young people aged 16–18 who were not in employment, education or training (NEET) at the end of 2021 at 13.6% (14,200) compared with 11.7% (11,900) at the end of 2020. There was also a slight increase of young people aged 19–24 who were NEET in 2021 at 16.3% (37,800) compared with 15.8% (37,700) in 2020.

## Persistent inequalities

In 2018/19, the attainment gap in early years development for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children compared with White British children was the largest of all ethnic groups at -35.0 percentage points.

Girls are more likely than boys to achieve expected outcomes at early years. 2018/19 there was an 8.8 percentage point gap in the proportion of girls and boys achieving a good level of development in early years. The gap was narrowest in 2016/17 (at 7.1 percentage points).

Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are excluded at higher rates overall than White pupils, but there are variations between ethnicities. For example, Chinese students are permanently excluded at the lowest rate and Asian students at the highest.

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There are racial disparities in experiences of bullying in Welsh schools. According to findings from the Schools Health Research Network (SHRN), in 2017/18 Gypsy, Roma, Traveller and White Irish children reported the highest rates of both being bullied in person (45% and 48% respectively) and cyberbullying (33% and 27%). They also reported as being most likely to have bullied another person.

The persistent disadvantage gap has remained unchanged since 2011. Pupils who experience persistent disadvantage were about 29 months behind in educational progress in 2019.

At the time of the 2021 Census, there were approximately 8,200 young carers in Wales (1.8% of 5–17-year-olds). The demands of caring can affect educational attainment and prevent young carers from fulfilling their potential.

Analysis of Welsh Government data for 2021 suggests that men are slightly more likely (8.9%) than women (7.3%) to hold no qualifications. There are higher proportions of men than women with no qualifications in all age groups up to ages 50–59 and 60–64. Women are more likely than men to hold qualifications at or above level 4 (GCSE).

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# Work

## What has improved?

Employment rates for those aged 16 and over have increased between 2011/12 (57.6%) and 2019/20 (61.3%), while both unemployment and economic inactivity rates fell.

All major ethnic groups have seen employment growth between 2010/11 and 2019/20, with particularly large growth for Black (from 54.0% to 63.6%) and Pakistani (43.9% to 54.5%) ethnic groups. The employment gap between White British and Black groups has completely closed, and the White British/Pakistani gap has narrowed significantly. However, change varies between Black African and Caribbean groups, and between sexes within the Black ethnic group.

Between 2013/14 and 2020/21, disabled adults' employment rates grew from 31.7% to 40.1%, and subsequently, the employment gap with non-disabled adults narrowed. However, evidence suggests that higher employment rates for disabled people may partially be driven by an increasing prevalence of disability in Britain.

In Wales (but not in England or Scotland), the proportion of ethnic minority workers in insecure employment has declined between 2010/11 and 2019/20. However, ethnic minority workers are still more likely to be in insecure work than White British workers.

## What has got worse?

During the pandemic, previous trends reversed. Between 2019/20 and 2021/22, employment rates dropped, unemployment rates rose, while economic inactivity rates rose from 36.2% to 37.1%. The pandemic period affected groups differently:

- 
- White ethnic groups (as a whole) have shown decline in employment and growth in economic inactivity. However, non-white ethnic minorities (as a whole) showed unchanged economic inactivity during the pandemic.
  - Adults aged 55–64 have shown significant decline in employment and increase in economic inactivity and unemployment.

In Wales, disabled workers' insecure employment rate showed a significant increase in 2021/22, creating a significant gap between disabled and non-disabled workers.

Although disabled workers' earnings have grown, the earnings gap between disabled and non-disabled workers has widened over time, from 12.0% in 2013/14 to 15.6% in 2019/20.

Between 2013/14 and 2019/20, disabled workers became increasingly more likely than non-disabled workers to be in a low paid occupation, as the gap between the percentage of disabled and non-disabled workers in a low paid occupation has widened.

Black workers (38.4%) are more likely than any other ethnic group to work in a low paid occupation and this has remained similar since 2011/12 (despite most other ethnic groups showing decline). This means that the gap between the percentage of Black and White British workers in a low paid occupation has widened.

Despite long-term growth in employment among the 55–64 age group, their earnings have not grown in real terms between 2010/11 and 2019/20. This has created a 10.9% wage gap with workers aged 45–54, who saw 52% growth in median hourly earnings during the same period.

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## Persistent inequalities

Several groups continue to earn less in 2019/20:

- Disabled workers compared with non-disabled workers (15.6% earnings gap). Earnings gaps are particularly large for workers with learning difficulties or disabilities (31.3% earnings gap).
- Bangladeshi workers compared with all other ethnic groups (16.7% lower earnings than White British) followed by Pakistani workers (10.5% lower than White British).
- Muslims workers have lower wages than all other religious/belief groups (15.8% lower than workers with No Religion).

People aged 16–24 and 55–64 continue to have lower rates of employment than all other groups aged under 65. Both these groups show higher rates of economic inactivity (even when excluding students) and younger people also continue to have higher rates of unemployment. Furthermore, workers aged 16–24 and workers aged over 70 are more likely than other workers to be in insecure employment. Evidence from the CIPD suggests that young people are also overrepresented in zero-hour contracts.

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# Living standards

## What has improved?

Relative poverty after housing costs in Wales declined between 2015/16 and 2019/20 for:

- adults aged 25–34 from 28.5% to 20.0%
- adults aged 45–54 from 24.8% to 17.6%
- non-disabled adults from 22.4% to 17.9%
- men from 25.2% to 20.0%

Severe material deprivation declined over the long-term for working age adults, from 26.1% in 2010/11 to 14.2% in 2019/20. Between 2015/16 and 2019/20 severe material deprivation declined for:

- adults aged 25–34, from 28.1% to 19.9%
- disabled (40.5% to 24.3%) and non-disabled adults (15.3% to 11.0%), although it remains higher among disabled adults than non-disabled adults

## What has got worse?

Relative poverty after housing costs in Wales rose for:

- adults aged 65–74, from 10.4% in 2010/11 to 18.0% in 2019/20
- Christian adults, from 15.0% in 2011/12 to 20.2% in 2018/19

The number of households in temporary accommodation has risen from 2,324 in March 2020 to 4,465 in March 2022, according to data from the Welsh Government.

Poverty rates rose among people aged 65–74 from 10.4% in 2010/11 to 18.0% in 2019/20. In 2021, 41% of all fuel-poor households were headed by someone aged 65 or over.

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## Persistent inequalities

Relative poverty after housing costs has not seen a statistically significant change in the long-term for the adult or child population overall, which was 20.9% and 31.3% respectively in 2019/20. Some groups with a consistently high poverty rate were:

- adults aged 16–24 (27.6%) and 35–44 (27.8%)
- disabled adults (27.3%) who remain more likely to be in poverty than non-disabled adults (17.9%)
- single-parent households. According to Welsh Government analysis, from 2020 to 2022, 38% of single-parent households were in poverty. Data from the Census 2021 shows that most (89.1%) single-parent households are headed by women

There was no statistically significant change in severe material deprivation between 2015/16 and 2019/20 for adults aged 35–44 (16.4% to 17.7%).

There remains a shortage of Gypsy and Traveller caravan pitches. The number of pitches on sites provided by local authorities increased by just 10 between July 2018 and July 2022 (from 399 to 409), according to data from the Welsh Government.

Single-parents and adults from Black and Other ethnic minority groups continue to be over-represented among homelessness applications:

- In 2018/19, single-parent households comprised 32.3% of homelessness cases according to analysis by the Welsh Government
- In 2021/22, 2.8% of applicants who were threatened with homelessness or found themselves homeless were Black, and 5.1% were from another ethnic group according to data from StatsWales

Research suggests 18% of dwellings in Wales have at least one category 1 hazard, putting older people's health at particular risk.



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# Health and social care

## What has improved?

The proportion of disabled people reporting good or very good health increased from 35.8% to 37.7% between 2016/17 and 2019/20, however this was still much lower than non-disabled (89.2% in 2019/20).

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data show that there was some improvement in the suicide rate for those aged 15–24 as this decreased between 2016 and 2019, from 11.7 to 7.5 deaths per 100,000 people. There has been no significant change in all other age groups.

The proportion of social care users who agreed that care and support services have helped them to have a higher quality of life increased for those aged 65–74 years (from 76.0% in 2018/19 to 85.7% in 2020/21) and for Christian social care users (from 71.6% in 2018/19 to 84.3% in 2020/21).

## What has got worse?

ONS analysis shows life expectancy decreased between 2018 and 2020 by 0.9 years to 82.1 years for females and 1.2 years to 78.3 years for males. This is linked to increased mortality from COVID-19.

In 2019/20, women were less likely to report being in good or very good health than men (69.9% compared with 72.9% respectively). Women's health has deteriorated from 2016 when they reported similar levels to men (72.9% for women compared with 73.2% for men).

The period of the COVID-19 pandemic saw negative trends for a number of groups' mental health:

- 
- A Welsh Government review found that 69% of lesbian, gay and bisexual people reported depression, rising to 90% among those who had experienced homophobia or transphobia.
  - The School Health Research Network found that children and young people with very high symptoms of poor mental health increased from one in five to one in four between 2019 and 2021.
  - A Wales Fiscal Analysis found that women reported a deterioration in mental health between April 2020–March 2021 compared with 2009–2019. Average symptom levels of poor mental health among women increased the most in January 2021 (by 16.2% compared with the same month pre-pandemic).
  - This analysis also found that ethnic minorities were disproportionately affected by the loss of factors that were protective of mental health, such as stable, secure employment. For example, workers of Bangladeshi ethnicity were over three times as likely to work in an industry that shut down over COVID-19 compared with White workers.

The rate of children looked after by local authorities had been increasing substantially from 5,160 in 2010 to 5,610 in 2015.

## **Persistent inequalities**

In 2018/19 some groups reported poorer mental health:

- More lesbian, gay and bisexual adults reported poorer mental health (31.8%) than heterosexual adults (20.9%)
- Women reported poorer mental health outcomes than men (22.6% compared to 20.3%)
- 34.3% of disabled adults stated they had poor mental health, compared with 15.4% of non-disabled people

The Schools Health and Research network found that 41% of Gypsy and Traveller children reported very high levels of symptoms linked with poor mental health in 2021.

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Research by the NHS benchmarking network found that demand for mental health services for children and young people is high, but some groups are under-represented:

- Between 2020 and 2022 there was a 39% increase in demand for community mental health services.
- Asian, Asian Welsh and Asian British children are under-represented in community caseloads, while Black children are over-represented in in-patient beds.

The NHS benchmarking network also found that waiting times for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) in Wales is higher than the UK average. In 2021/22, one in four patients in Wales, compared to one in five patients in the UK, waited for over 18 weeks.

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# Justice and personal security

## What has improved?

Youth Justice Board data show that the number of children in youth detention has decreased. There were on average 450 children aged 10–17 in custody in England and Wales in 2021/22, a 47% decrease since 2018/19 and the lowest number on record.

The estimated prevalence of hate crime in the Crime Survey for England and Wales has fallen between 2007–2009 and 2017–2020, though not across all monitored strands. Over this period:

- sexual orientation hate crime has fallen 67%, though this decline has slowed since 2012–2015
- disability hate crime has fallen 38%
- race hate crime has fallen 31%, though this appears to be levelling off since around 2012–2015, when differences are no longer statistically significant

Data from the Home Office shows that recording of hate crime by the police has generally increased over the last few years. This is believed to be due to improvements in the reporting of these crimes and recording practices among police forces. Recorded hate crime for all strands was at its highest level in 2021/22.

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## What has got worse?

Data from the Home Office shows a total of 20,919 people entered immigration detention in the year ending March 2025 under immigration powers, 10% higher than the previous year. This increase continues an upward trend seen since 2023 which followed a longer-term downward trend since 2015<sup>3</sup>.

Home Office analysis of police-recorded crime data shows genuine spikes in racially and religiously aggravated offences around key trigger events, including the EU Referendum and Black Lives Matter protests and far right counterprotests.

Religiously motivated hate crime did not fall between 2007–2009 and 2017–2020, in a similar way to other hate crimes.

Charges for rape offences have fallen. Our analysis of police outcomes data in England and Wales found that between 2015/16 and 2020/21, the proportion of rape offences for female victims aged 16 and over fell from 10.5% to 2.6%, while for male victims aged 16 and over it fell from 5.1% to 1.0%.

Some cases do not end in a police charge because victims withdraw their case. Female victims have consistently been more likely to withdraw their case when the suspect is identified than male victims.

Our analysis of police outcomes data found that the proportion of female victims aged 16 and over who withdrew their cases when the suspect was identified increased from 35.4% in 2015/16 to 42.0% in 2020/21 while for male victims it stayed relatively stable, only increasing from 21.5% in 2015/16 to 23.6% in 2020/21.

Our inquiry into disabled people's experience of the criminal justice system found the increased use of remote links impeded effective participation and neurodivergent defendants found it particularly difficult to follow and participate in proceedings.

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<sup>3</sup> How many people are detained under immigration powers in the UK? Home Office 25 June 2025 [accessed 28 July 2025]

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## Persistent inequalities

Home Office statistics show that in England and Wales Black people are more likely to be arrested, have force used against them by police, and be subject to stop and search.

- The arrest rate in 2021/22 was 2.4 times higher for Black people than White people and 1.3 times higher for people from the mixed ethnic group. The arrest rate for Asian people (0.8) and other ethnic groups (0.9) was lower than White people for the first time.
- Police used force against Black people at a rate 3.5 times higher than against White people in 2021/22 (3.0 when excluding the Metropolitan Police).
- At the end of March 2022, Black people were stopped and searched 4.9 times as often as White people, down from 5.6 in 2020/21.

Ministry of Justice data shows Black individuals continue to be overrepresented in prisons in England and Wales. In 2022, 13% of prisoners in England and Wales declared themselves as being from a Black or Black British ethnic group (compared with 4% in the population). This has remained stable since 2013.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons surveys found that disabled prisoners in England and Wales were more likely to say they did not feel safe.

ONS analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 121,000 women experience rape and 103,000 experienced assault by penetration a year, compared with 7,000 and 16,000 men experiencing rape and assault by penetration respectively. This has remained stable over time.

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# Participation

## What has improved?

In the 2021 Senedd election (for the Sixth Senedd) 43.3% of elected assembly members were women, an increase from 41.7% in the 2016 elections (for the Fifth Senedd). However, due to membership changes during the Fifth Senedd the number of women in post in the Senedd had increased to 48.3% prior to the 2021 election.

The 2022 Local Government Candidates Survey in Wales found only 4% of elected county and community councillors were from an ethnic minority (excluding White minority) background, compared to 6.2% in the overall Welsh population. However, the proportion of councillors from ethnic minority backgrounds has increased compared with the 2018 survey.

Representation of women and ethnic minorities has improved among public appointees in Wales. Data from the Commissioner for Public Appointments shows that in Wales:

- The proportion of public appointments and reappointments of people from ethnic minority backgrounds increased from 3.9% in 2015/16 to 12.7% in 2021/22.
- In 2021/22, 58.8% of new appointees in Wales were women, compared with 55.6% in 2020/21.

The proportion of adults in Wales in all age groups who feel they belong in their local area has increased. In 2020/21, people aged 65–74 (89%) and 75 and over (90%) are more likely to feel they belong in their local area than those in younger age groups.

Welsh Government data shows that between 2018/19 and 2021/22 in Wales, the proportion of households with internet access at home improved for people aged 65–74 (83% to 88%) and 75 and over (54% to 71%).

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## What has got worse?

Analysis of the National Survey for Wales found that women are significantly less likely to feel safe in their local community than men. Women felt less safe in 2021/22 than they did in 2016/17. In 2021/22, 51% of women felt safe at home and walking or travelling in the local area (56% in 2016/17) compared with 81% of men (82% in 2016/17).

Public Health Wales analysis shows that in 2016/17, 18.3% of young people reported they did the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day in the past seven days, compared with 16.2% in 2021/22.

## Persistent inequalities

People aged 75 and over were the most likely to have voted (80.8%) in the 2019 general election, and those aged 18–24 (53.6%) and 25–34 (53.6%) were the least likely.

In 2018/19, 72.6% of heterosexual adults in Wales agreed that they belonged to their local community compared with 63.2% of adults who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or 'other' sexual orientation.

Data from the National Survey for Wales shows that in 2021/22:

- People aged 65–74 (40.5%) and 75 and over (17.2%) were less likely than other age groups to have participated in any sport or physical activity.
- Men are consistently more likely to participate in sport than women in Wales, at 60.7% compared with 51.5% respectively in 2021/22.

Findings from Sports Wales show that in 2021/22, 42% of adults with a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity (compared with 68% without) participated in at least one sport or physical activity.

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Older adults are at greater risk of digital exclusion and disadvantage. Those aged 65 or over are still significantly less likely than younger age groups to have internet access at home. Furthermore, only 24% of those aged over 70 are likely to use digital technology to support their health compared to 87% of people aged 16–19.

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# Conclusions

The data in our Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Wales Fairer? 2023 form the basis for the evidence in this briefing and show a mixed picture since our 2018 report.

There are some areas of progress. These include:

- greater diversity in public appointments
- a narrowing of the gender pay gap
- a narrowing of the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people

There is significant work to be done to address some longstanding issues, and to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

We have seen little progress in several areas. For example, educational attainment for disabled learners in Wales is falling behind England and Scotland. Poverty remains a persistent problem. We have seen an increase in racially and religiously aggravated offences at the same time as a reduction in the number of offences resulting in a charge. Emerging challenges include artificial intelligence and climate change.

There are data and evidence gaps in Wales. They limit our ability to make a comprehensive and detailed assessment of progress. These gaps were exacerbated by the interruption to the flow of data caused by the pandemic. The gaps exist in the collection of data generally and in data broken down by region and protected characteristic.

We welcome the establishment of new national data units. It is vital that the data units and others continue to address data gaps to ensure access to better, disaggregated and consistent data. This can inform strategic decision making and achieve impact.

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This briefing contains a snapshot of key findings from our *Is Wales Fairer? 2023* report, drawing on our data and evidence. We urge all parties and candidates standing for election to the Senedd in May 2026 to consider the full report as they develop their own plans for Wales.

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# Contacts

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Published August 2025

# Agenda Item 3.2

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

3<sup>rd</sup> March 2026

Dear Chair

## **Re: Children, Young People and Education Committee Legacy Report**

We're writing on behalf of the All-Wales Occupational Therapy Paediatrics Network, which is made up of OTs from across Wales working in the Welsh NHS, schools, local authorities and independent practice.

Through the Royal College of Occupational Therapists (RCOT) we fed into your current inquiry on education and ALN reforms, with our focus being on the impact of these changes on children and how we can best support them.

We work very closely with school communities in enabling ALN students to receive the support they deserve. It was interesting to read how one ALN school leader said in your teacher recruitment and retention report that they are expected to be a range of professions, including occupational therapists.

As the work of the Committee comes to an end for the Sixth Senedd, we wanted to write to offer up some possible avenues of inquiry for the Seventh Senedd, if the Committee is re-established, that you could include in your legacy report.

**The benefits of widening OT participation in nurseries and schools:** OTs work with students on their physical, sensory, or cognitive difficulties to improve independence and participation in school activities. Currently, there is a scheme in Neath Port Talbot and Swansea council areas which sees OTs working with secondary schools, giving teachers the tools they need to identify students with difficulties and how best to support them or refer to specialist teams. This scheme is enabling teachers to focus on teaching and getting early intervention in place for the student.

**OT training and CPD:** there has been great progress in the number of training places for OT students across Wales over the last few years, especially with the development of the OT course at Swansea University. However, we are keen to widen accessibility even further through degree apprenticeships, enabling people from all communities to start a career in OT. There is, however, limited opportunities for CPD in Wales. A number of courses are only available in other parts of the UK and this impacts what Welsh NHS funding is available for Welsh workers to apply for these courses. We are also

concerned around the limited access to specific paediatric training as OTs are usually part of a generic adult team.

**Access of independent practitioners into schools:** the demand for students to have OT assessments is growing and a number of parents are utilising independent OT practices to carry these out, to ensure their children receive all the support they need. Unfortunately, there is inconsistency across schools and local authorities in enabling these assessments to be carried out in school with the OT monitoring the student in the classroom. This is having an impact not only on the family to receive timely advice but on the independent practices who are struggling to fully provide for their clients.

We would be delighted to meet with yourself and the Committee Clerk to explore the scope of these inquiries and how they would be beneficial to the wider education community.

We look forward to hearing from you.

**Paula Curtis**

**Chair, All-Wales Occupational Therapy Paediatrics Network**

**Kelly Southway**

**Vice Chair, All-Wales Occupational Therapy Paediatrics Network**

Buffy Williams MS  
Chair of the Children, Young People and Education  
Committee [SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales](mailto:SeneddChildren@Senedd.Wales)

Eich cyf/Your ref:

Ein cyf / Our ref:

Dyddiad / Date: 4 March 2026

Dear Buffy Williams MS,

Thank you for your letter of 9 February 2026 following the Committee's scrutiny session on 28 January. We welcome the opportunity to provide further clarity on Care Inspectorate Wales's (CIW) strategic role within the children's social care system, and to reaffirm our commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people across Wales.

We recognise the Committee's significant focus on children's social care throughout the Sixth Senedd and share your concerns about the systemic pressures that have contributed to variation in quality, safeguarding practice, governance, and children's lived experiences. As Wales's independent inspectorate for social care, we take seriously our responsibility to identify risk, highlight learning, and use our voice to support national, regional, and local improvement.

What follows addresses each of the Committee's questions.

**1. CIW's strategic role for local authority social services: How does CIW ensure that its own inspections and its joint inspections of local authorities, its thematic reviews and its intelligence works to build a coherent picture of system performance across Wales? Are there effective mechanisms in place for CIW to identify patterns, escalate concerns to Welsh Government and support the improvement across local authorities?**

CIW operates a risk-based inspection and assurance model, informed by our Intelligence, Performance and Risk Management (IPERM) framework. IPERM enables us to synthesise

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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.

information from inspections, notifications, complaints, regulatory activity, and partner intelligence to identify emerging risks, patterns, and variation across Wales.

Our system-level oversight is strengthened through:

### **Joint inspections and thematic reviews**

- **Joint inspections** with Estyn and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales allow us to examine children’s experiences across organisational boundaries and understand how the wider system functions, rather than evaluating a single agency in isolation.
- **Thematic national reviews** intentionally look across Wales to hold a "mirror to the system"—highlighting strengths, areas of concern, and learning that applies to all local authorities.

Our [Child Protection Rapid Review in 2022 – 23](#) and [Joint Inspection of Child Protection Arrangements 2019 – 2024](#) are recent significant examples of work with other inspectorates to provide a system wide approach to considering local authority performance.

These approaches were developed precisely because traditional single-agency inspections could not fully account for system-level risks.

Our [Chief Inspector’s Annual Report for 2024-25](#) at page 38 sets out the important areas for improvement arising from our work in local authorities – including the need for more consistent application of thresholds and timescales as required by the Wales Safeguarding Procedures.

### **Intelligence sharing and escalation mechanisms**

We maintain structured engagement with Welsh Government policy officials, including regular meetings with the Social Services Directorate. These discussions allow us to raise concerns early—particularly in relation to safeguarding, workforce, governance, and thresholds for intervention.

When CIW identifies serious, cumulative, sustained or systemic failings within a local authority it activates its formal Services Requiring Significant Improvement (SRSI) process. A service designated as requiring significant improvement is immediately subject to an Improvement Conference, involving senior leaders and all relevant partners, where CIW sets out the priority actions, evidence expectations and timelines for change. This is followed by enhanced monitoring, which can include increased inspection activity, targeted evidence reviews, and frequent assurance meetings to track progress and ensure risks and actions are being appropriately managed.

We also work closely with Social Care Wales (SCW), sharing relevant insight and ensuring alignment around sector-led improvement. In addition to being the workforce regulator, SCW’s role is to lead improvement in social care in Wales – including improvement in local authorities. CIW is a member of the newly established Strategic Implementation Group for Improvement to be chaired by SCW and the National Office for Care and Support in Welsh

Government. Through our contribution to the work of this group, we will continue to provide learning from our inspection, intelligence, and strategic engagement and contribute to national system learning.

While CIW is not an improvement agency we can identify issues, guide, and support improvement. Our approach to local authority inspection reflects the principles of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. The approach is underpinned by four core principles: voice and control, prevention and early intervention, well-being, and partnership working. We seek to recognise the strengths in the system and also be clear about the areas for improvement.

However, we do not have the power to require change in local authority leadership, resourcing, or strategic direction.

**2. Learning from inspections: How does CIW assure itself – and us – that issues in inspection reports relating to the performance of social services are swiftly highlighted to other local authorities? We note that a joint CIW and Estyn inspection was carried out following the Gwynedd review. What changes, if any, will CIW be making to its future inspections to ensure cultural failings, weak governance or non-compliance with established safeguarding processes and guidance are always identified in inspection reports?**

We agree with the Committee's emphasis on learning and dissemination. In recent months, we have strengthened our internal processes so that all inspection reports are automatically shared with every Director of Social Services across Wales, ensuring rapid awareness of cross-cutting themes.

In future inspections, we will:

- Further strengthen scrutiny of culture, leadership openness, and governance.
- Build upon learning from the Gwynedd Child Practice Review.
- Embed work arising from our positive cultures programme, which aims to support inspectors to better understand organisational culture, professional curiosity, and psychological safety.
- Enhance internal reflection so that we continually refine our methods and improve the conditions in which children, staff, and partners feel safe sharing concerns with inspectors.

We remain disappointed that during past work—including the 2018 inspection in Gwynedd—issues that later emerged through the Child Practice Review were not raised nor disclosed to inspectors. This reinforces the importance of building cultures of honesty, openness, and shared learning.

### **3. Voice of the child: How is CIW strengthening its own approach to hearing directly from children and young people? How does this test whether children’s voices genuinely influence inspection outcomes?**

CIW recognises children’s experiences and views must meaningfully shape inspection outcomes. Across the full inspection programme – local authority services, regulated services, childcare and play, fostering and adoption, and thematic work – the voice of the child is central.

We:

- Speak directly with children during all regulated services inspections (residential care and childcare and play).
- Seek to engage children during local authority inspections. Inspectors now draw on a broad range of engagement methods—including direct conversations (where children wish to engage), phone or email follow-ups, surveys, observation of day-to-day interactions, and insights from advocates, social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers, complaints and notifications.
- Work with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, who sits on our National Advisory Board.
- Produced the resource, “[What Good Care Looks Like](#),” developed with children and young people to describe what they want from residential care, resulting in Welsh Government producing national “[Guidance for registering a care home for children](#)”
- Continue to explore new ways of involving children more consistently in or local authority inspections, including through young carers’ groups, youth forums, and pre-inspection engagement activities led by inspection managers. For example, in advance of a forthcoming inspection of children’s services in Blaenau Gwent, we recently attended a young carers’ forum and a group run by the local authority to provide emotional support for children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

We acknowledge there is more to do, particularly to diversify the voices we hear and avoid over-reliance on the same small group of young advisors already engaged across Welsh Government consultations.

We will continue strengthening our approach and testing the success of how children’s views materially shape our judgments.

### **4. Oversight and knowledge gaps: There is a lack of Welsh-specific oversight in Deprivation of Liberty (DoL) cases applying to children as was highlighted in our session and as set out in our previous scrutiny work. What role does CIW believe it should play in addressing this gap, and where do you believe responsibility should sit for maintaining oversight of children subject to Deprivation of Liberty orders and those living in unregistered settings?**

## Deprivation of Liberty Orders (DoLs)

The Committee is right to highlight the lack of a national Welsh mechanism to collate DoLs data for children.

Currently:

- There is no statutory duty on local authorities to notify CIW of children subject to DoLs orders.
- Some intelligence emerges indirectly through our inspections or through the residential care sector, but this is incomplete.
- The number of notifications we received from providers about children living in care homes subject to DoLs has risen significantly—from 16 in 2023/24 to 50 in 2024/25. We believe this increase happened because we issued guidance to providers in February 2024.

In our view, a national data collection mechanism, potentially through the local authority 'Checkpoint' dataset could be a potential solution. This would ensure visibility for Welsh Government, local authorities, the Family Court, and inspectorates alike.

## Children in unregistered settings

CIW continues to monitor services operating without registration and take enforcement action where appropriate. However:

- There is no statutory duty requiring local authorities to notify us of unregistered placements; current arrangements are based on agreement and practice, not law.
- While we receive information about unregistered settings, we do not hold nor require detailed data about individual children, as this is neither necessary nor appropriate for our regulatory role.
- Local authorities hold statutory responsibility for ensuring these placements are safe and temporary, and for securing registered placements as soon as possible.

We would welcome a whole-system discussion on the adequacy of current notification duties.

**5. Financial pressures: We are aware of reports that some private providers of accommodation for children in care have doubled their placements costs during the implementation of the legislation to restrict profit. How concerned is CIW about the impact of this on local authority budgets and in turn the delivery and stability of children's social services in the short to medium term?**

We have heard anecdotal reports some for-profit providers are significantly increasing placement fees during the transition period toward eliminating profit from children's services. We have also heard of similar cost increases among some not-for-profit providers.

However:

- We have not received widespread evidence from local authorities that their budgets are destabilised specifically because of the “eliminate profit” reforms.
- We are aware children’s social services budgets across Wales are routinely under pressure, and this remains a long-standing concern.
- Our priority is always ensuring children receive safe, appropriate placements, and will closely monitor the impact on children as reforms progress.

The transition period up to 2030 is welcome as it enables the essential transition from for profit to not for profit services. Nevertheless, there is uncertainty, including questions about adequate and appropriate future supply of care home places for children. We will continue to share intelligence with Welsh Government as the market evolves.

## **6. Looking ahead: What is the single most important message you would wish to convey to the next Welsh Government about the challenges facing Care Inspectorate Wales and its work in trying to ensure the provision of quality services for children and young people?**

The next Welsh Government will have a critical opportunity to ensure CIW is sufficiently resourced and empowered to deliver its functions, and that inspectorates and improvement bodies across the system are aligned in purpose, data sharing, and ambition. Our ambition in CIW is only bounded by the resources available.

Ensuring the provision of quality services for children and young people requires shared leadership across local authorities, health boards, inspectorates, regulators and Welsh Government. No single body can achieve this alone. A coordinated, multi-agency approach—supported by clear accountability and data —will be essential to achieving further meaningful change.

## **7. Additional information requested by the Committee**

### **1. How extensively CIW inspectors speak directly with children and young people living in social care settings, and how this has changed over time?**

All our inspections of childcare and play services and inspections of care homes for children will include speaking to children. In 2024 – 2025 we undertook 946 inspections of childcare and play services. In each of these inspectors spoke directly with children. In the same year we delivered 201 inspections of care homes for children – again, each of these would have included speaking and listening to children.

In our inspections of local authority children’s services inspectors will have direct conversations with children where safe and appropriate. The committee will appreciate that children amid a traumatic period in their lives may not want to meet with us, or it may damage their wellbeing/ recovery for them to do so. We will always consider the circumstances for individual children through the social services records at every inspection of children’s services and engage with family members and professionals to question and

understand the experience of the child concerned. In this way we strive to understand the extent to which the child’s voice is represented and shaping the support offered to them.

CIW does not currently produce one Wales wide number for children engaged across all inspections. As described above, our engagement methods vary across our different activities, with some involving relatively large numbers of children, e.g. nurseries, and others focusing on in depth consideration of the experiences of a small number of children and young people, e.g. inspections of local authority children’s services.

**2. When CIW last inspected Gwynedd Children’s services prior to the 2025 report and the findings of that inspection.**

Inspection activity in Gwynedd occurred as follows during the period 2018 – 2025.

- Children’s Services Inspection – 01-04 May 2018 and 14-18 May 2018.
- Children’s Services Focused Activity – 17 October 2019.
- Children’s Services (also included Adults Services) COVID-19 Assurance Check – 18-22 January 2021.
- Children’s Services Child Protection Rapid Review – 27-29 March 2023.
- Children’s Services joint inspection with Estyn – 10-13 November 2025.

Type & Date of Activity	Findings
<p><b><u>Children’s Services Inspection</u></b></p> <p><b>Week 1: (x4 days) 01 May 2018 – 04 May 2018</b></p> <p><b>Week 2: (x5 days) 14 May 2018 - 18 May 2018</b></p>	<p>The inspection focused on looked after children, care leavers, safeguarding, and corporate parenting. Staff were skilled and committed, with strong multi-agency working and proper child protection procedures. However, issues were found with safety plans, care reviews, placement suitability, foster carer availability, and advocacy access. Key recommendations included improving early help, updating assessments, strengthening care planning and reviews, recruiting more foster carers, and enhancing safeguarding checks and advocacy support.</p>
<p><b><u>Children’s Services</u></b></p> <p><b>Focused Activity</b></p> <p><b>17 October 2019</b></p>	<p>The inspection found strong multi-agency working and generally positive staff feedback on support and training. Most referrals were handled appropriately and assessments were thorough. Children’s voices were heard, though consistency was needed, especially in sibling groups. Safeguarding plans were mostly in place, but some cases lacked timely responses or risk assessments. Supervision arrangements were effective but stretched. Delays in service provision and care planning were noted. CIW recommended improvements in record-keeping, contingency planning during staff absence, and timely follow-up on agreed support.</p>

<p><b><u>Children's Services</u></b> (also included Adults Services)</p> <p><b>COVID-19 Assurance Check</b></p> <p><b>18 January 2021 – 22 January 2021</b></p>	<p>The purpose of the assurance check was to review how well local authority social services continued to help and support adults and children with a focus on safety and well-being during the pandemic</p> <p><b>Children:</b> maintained contact, timely referrals, innovative models. Areas for improvement: recording, supervision, clarity in assessments, waiting lists, direct payments, individualisation in care plans.</p>
<p><b>November 2022 – National Child Protection Rapid Review Commissioned</b></p>	<p>Multi-agency rapid review of child protection decision-making across Wales, including Gwynedd.</p>
<p><b><u>Children's Services</u></b></p> <p><b>Child Protection Rapid Review</b></p> <p><b>27 March 2023 – 29 March 2023</b></p>	<p>Formal feedback post-inspection activity included the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong leadership and clear vision in Gwynedd's children's services.</li> <li>• Effective multi-agency working, though some delays in information sharing noted.</li> <li>• Evidence-based decisions on child protection registration but recording of progress and future risk could improve.</li> <li>• Staffing challenges impact practice quality and compliance with safeguarding procedures.</li> <li>• Inconsistent understanding of thresholds among partner agencies; joint training recommended.</li> <li>• Children's voices are considered, but opportunities for stronger participation should be developed.</li> <li>• Pay grading concerns may affect recruitment and retention.</li> <li>• Police non-attendance at review conferences seen as a missed opportunity.</li> <li>• Chairpersons' consistency and commitment are a clear strength.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Final Child Protection Review Published</b></p> <p><b>28 September 2023</b></p>	<p>Gwynedd highlighted for use of Effective Child Protection (ECP) and Risk Models.</p> <p><b>Strengths:</b> consistency, clear guidance, visual tools.  <b>Areas for improvement:</b> multi-agency engagement, communication, training, workforce capacity, child's voice.</p>

	<p><b>Recommendations:</b> adopt clear models, improve multi-agency training, strengthen communication, ensure children’s voices are central.</p>
<p><b><u>Children’s Services</u></b></p> <p><b>Joint inspection with Estyn</b></p> <p><b>10 November - 13 November 2025</b></p>	<p>CIW conducted a joint inspection with Estyn in Gwynedd local authority Children and Families’ Services and Education department.</p> <p>The purpose of the joint inspection was to review the local authority’s performance in exercising its social services duties and functions in line with legislation. CIW and Estyn sought to answer the following main question aligned under the principles of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014:</p> <p><b>How well are children protected from individuals who may pose a risk to them and when concerns arise about those who care for them or work with them, either in a paid or voluntary role?</b></p> <p><u>Strengths:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear strategic commitment to safeguarding, demonstrated by senior leaders, elected members, and strong governance with independent oversight from the Recovery Board.</li> <li>• Children’s participation is well-promoted through initiatives such as Llais Ni and youth forums across school, district, and county levels.</li> <li>• Effective multi-agency relationships, with generally strong collaboration between police, health services (BCUHB) and third-sector partners, including appropriate information sharing in many cases.</li> <li>• Examples of practice compliant with Wales Safeguarding Procedures, demonstrating adherence to national standards.</li> <li>• Schools have strong safeguarding infrastructures, with policies, designated leads, and pupil-wellbeing forums.</li> <li>• Mixed-method safeguarding training is available and monitored for compliance.</li> <li>• Social workers receive good managerial support, structured supervision and guidance for complex cases.</li> <li>• Scrutiny functions provide transparency and accountability, with committees and panels actively reviewing safeguarding arrangements.</li> </ul> <p><u>Areas for improvement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of timely acknowledgments</b> for individuals/professionals who report safeguarding concerns (not routinely within 7 working days).</li> <li>• <b>Social worker engagement with children at risk</b> needs strengthening, particularly where concerns involve individuals in positions of trust.</li> </ul>

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Quality Assurance systems require strengthening</b> to enable leaders to monitor data more effectively and improve frontline practice.</li><li>• <b>Weak collaboration between children’s services and commissioning</b>, limiting effective planning for children’s safety and well-being.</li><li>• <b>More accessible specialist training</b> is needed, particularly on grooming and emerging risks.</li><li>• <b>Inconsistent understanding across departments</b> regarding the role of the Education Safeguarding &amp; Well-being Team.</li><li>• <b>Multi-agency strategy discussions require improvement</b>, particularly in consistency and quality.</li><li>• <b>Corporate safeguarding coherence needs strengthening</b>, with clearer policies, procedures, and cross-Council strategies, including a shared approach to the voice of the child.</li></ul> |
|--|--|

We appreciate the opportunity to give evidence to demonstrate our commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people in Wales. We look forward to future engagement in respect of our 2025/26 annual report.

Yours sincerely



Gillian Baranski  
**Chief Inspector**  
Care Inspectorate Wales

# Agenda Item 3.4

Dear Ms Williams,

We are writing to you as the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, to introduce ourselves and to explain the work of the Literacy Expert Panel (LEP).

The LEP has been advising on a national approach to literacy that is firmly grounded in scientific evidence, drawing on the diverse experiences and expertise of its members. This multidisciplinary panel comprises leading researchers with many years of experience and deep knowledge of effective literacy teaching. A majority of panellists also have direct experience of teaching literacy with children and young people, ensuring that our discussions are informed by both research and classroom practice.

An early focus of our work has been the development of a *Key Principles* document designed to support teachers and all education stakeholders in Wales to ensure effective literacy teaching and learning.

One of the principles that we have developed is recognition of the fundamental importance of oral language development to the development of reading and writing. Another principle is the importance of systematic phonics teaching: this principle has been augmented with a *Statement of Intent* for further clarity in relation to phonics teaching.

The LEP, which has to date met 14 times over as many months, is highly motivated to contribute to building a scientific, evidence-informed approach to literacy that can be applied consistently across Wales.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our work with you further should you wish to do so.

Best regards,

The Literacy Expert Panel:

Angella Cooze  
Cameron Downing  
Usha Goswami  
Carl Hughes  
Manon Jones  
James Mannion  
Sharon McMurray  
Dominic Wyse

# Agenda Item 3.5

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



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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

5 March 2026

Dear Buffy,

The Cabinet Secretary and I wrote to the Children, Young People and Education Committee ahead of its meeting on 4 February. In that letter, there was an action point to provide 'Further information on assessments on the affordability of increasing student loan outlay at a greater rate than the UK Government and the impact this will have on future support packages' and I offered the Committee a technical briefing.

Due to time constraints on Committee time, I agreed to provide a written note. The note attached provides an explanation of the two principal fiscal pressures affecting the Welsh Government's student loans system.

Should you require any further information I would be happy to provide it.

Yours sincerely,

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

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## Welsh Government Briefing: Student Loans Budget Control – AME and RAB Pressures

### **Background**

CYPE committee met on 4 February and received a letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Minister for Further and Higher Education. In the letter under the action point 'Further information on assessments on the affordability of increasing student loan outlay at a greater rate than the UK Government and the impact this will have on future support packages' the Minister offered the Committee a technical briefing.

Due to time constraints on Committee time, the Minister agreed to provide a written note.

This briefing provides an explanation of the two principal fiscal pressures affecting the Welsh Government's student loans system:

1. **The Annually Managed Expenditure (AME) control on total student loan outlay**, including maintenance and fee loans; and
2. **The Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) charge**, which reflects the long-term cost of non-repayment and is subject to a separate, ring-fenced spending limit.

### **Overview of Student Loans Budget Controls**

The Welsh Government operates its student finance system within two distinct HM Treasury controls:

#### **AME Control (Loan Outlay Limit)**

- AME funds the cash cost of issuing new student loans.
- HM Treasury provides AME cover on the basis that Welsh student support arrangements remain **broadly comparable** to those in England.
- If Welsh loan outlay grows materially faster than the English comparator, HM Treasury may conclude that the system is no longer comparable, placing restrictions on future AME cover and requiring the difference to be funded from the Welsh Government's core RDEL budget.

#### **RAB Control (Impairment/Non-Repayment Limit)**

- The RAB charge reflects the portion of newly issued loans not expected to be repaid.
- Wales receives cover for RAB non-cash costs from HM Treasury, limited to a Barnett share of England's forecast RAB charge.

- Any RAB cost above that allocation must be funded from the Welsh Government's **core RDEL budget**.

These two controls operate in parallel. A breach of either, results in immediate fiscal pressure for Welsh Government.

## **AME Pressures**

### **Growth in Loan Outlay**

Loan outlay has increased steadily in Wales due to:

- Since implementation of the Diamond recommendations from 2018-19, uprating total maintenance support has been in line with the National Living Wage up to 2024/25, and since 2025-26 with CPI inflation;
- Freezing maintenance grant amounts and thresholds, shifting a greater share of support into loans;
- Increases in tuition-fee caps to match England;
- A progressive maintenance model that maintains higher levels of support per student relative to England.

These changes have resulted in Welsh maintenance loans rising faster than their English counterparts, where maintenance loans have not kept pace with inflation. As a result, Wales is now operating close to the implicit AME ceiling set by its comparability position.

### **Grant Outlay**

As referenced in the Growth in Loan Outlay section, grant amounts have been fixed from 2018-19 to 2025-26, with total inflationary uplifts being absorbed by increasing the loan amounts accordingly.

- Each year, under the current support policy, fewer students are eligible for the higher levels of grant as income thresholds remain frozen.
- For 2026/27 we implementing a CPI based 2% inflationary uplift to both the maintenance loan and grant support.
- This helps control the increase in loan amounts, as the overall uplift is spread across both loans and grants for 2026/27.

## **RAB pressures**

### **Forecast RAB Position**

Modelling from the updated cross-UK repayments model indicates that Wales' RAB charge for 2025-26 may rise to approximately £367m, exceeding the available RAB budget (set by the Barnett share England's forecast).

HM Treasury has already signaled that Wales may be required to meet approximately £7.7m of this from its own RDEL budget, subject to final outturn.

### **Drivers of rising RAB Costs**

The forecast breach arises from several factors:

- **Updated graduate earnings and repayments model:** The most important cause of this increase is the move to the improved shared UK graduate repayments model. The new model significantly reduces projections of graduate earnings and therefore repayments.
- **Policy divergence from England:** Wales retains the Plan 2 repayment policy, whereas England has moved to Plan 5 for new cohorts (from September 2023). Plan 5 has a lower income threshold at which repayments start (for 2025-26, £25,000 compared with £28,470 for Plan 2), as well as a longer repayment term (40 years, compared with the 30 years for Plan 2).
- **Loan outlay growth:** Higher loan outlay feeds directly into higher expected write-off costs.

### **Updated Repayment Model and Impacts on Borrowers**

#### **The New Student Loan Repayment Model**

Welsh Government, DfE and other devolved UK administrations have adopted a common UK-wide graduate earnings and repayments model. Key features include:

- Updated assumptions about real earnings growth;
- Refreshed graduate income distributions;
- Updated employment and repayment behaviour data.

DfE first implemented the updated model in 2020, Welsh Government beginning transitioning to aspects of the new model from 2021, as the model was developed to enable use by Welsh Government and the other Devolved Administrations. A full end to end model was available for testing by Welsh Government in spring 2025.

Following full testing and quality assurance, the full new model was approved for use for the 25-26 Welsh Government accounts and AME returns. This timing is in line with other Devolved UK administrations.

Moving to the new model has resulted in a significant increase in the RAB charge, driven by using a new data source as a basis for earnings growth and the subsequent impact that has on repayment levels. The other Devolved UK Administrations have seen a similar impact.

### **Combined Effect of AME and RAB Constraints**

The interaction of the two controls is now creating a dual pressure:

- **AME constraint:** Wales is close to the limit of the AME coverage it can justify under the comparability principle.
- **RAB constraint:** The latest modelling significantly increases the estimated non-repayment cost, exceeding the ring-fenced RAB budget.

In combination, these create a more challenging affordability environment than in previous years. Even modest further growth in loan outlay or divergence from English repayment policy is likely to prove unsustainable under HM Treasury controls.

## **Key Risks and Considerations for Senedd Members**

- **Fiscal risk:** Future overspends could place recurring pressures on the RDEL budget.
- **Operational risk:** Divergent repayment rules pose feasibility and cost challenges for HMRC and the Student Loans Company.
- **Policy coherence:** Any adjustments to maintenance or repayment structures must consider participation, fairness and comparability.
- **Timing:** Significant modelling updates coincide with limited policy-making periods ahead of the election.

## **Next Steps**

Officials continue to assess options for improving affordability while maintaining fairness and policy coherence. Addressing the issues outlined in this paper will form a core part of the Welsh Government response to **The future of tertiary education in Wales: five challenges and calls for submission**<sup>1</sup>.

## **Contact**

- For further information, officials in the Strategy & Funding Division can provide technical analysis or additional briefing as required.

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<sup>1</sup> [The future of tertiary education in Wales: five challenges and calls for submission | GOV.WALES](#)

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