

# Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

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Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Committee Room 1 – Senedd	Llinos Madeley
Meeting date: 28 November 2018	Committee Clerk
Meeting time: 10.00	0300 200 6565
	<a href="mailto:SeneddCYPE@assembly.wales">SeneddCYPE@assembly.wales</a>

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## Private Pre-meeting

(10.00 – 10.15)

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

(10.15)

### 2 Inquiry into the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification – evidence session 4

(10.15 – 11.15)

(Pages 1 – 19)

#### Colegau Cymru and CECA

Dafydd Evans, Chair – ColegauCymru and CEO – Grŵp Llandrillo Menai

Kay Martin, Principal – Cardiff and Vale College, also representing

ColegauCymru

Nick Brazil, Deputy Principal – Gower College Swansea, also representing

ColegauCymru

Dr Rachel Bowen, Director of Policy and Development – ColegauCymru

Ed Evans, Director and Secretary Civil Engineering Contractors Association

(CECA) Wales



Attached Documents:

Research Brief

CYPE(5)-34-18: Paper 1 – ColegauCymru

CYPE(5)-34-18: Paper 2 – Civil Engineering Contractors Association (CECA)

### **3 Paper to note**

(11.15)

#### **3.1 Letter from the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care – Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill**

(Pages 20 – 24)

Attached Documents:

CYPE(5)-34-18 – Paper to note 1

#### **3.2 Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to the Children's Commissioner for Wales – Home Education**

(Pages 25 – 26)

Attached Documents:

CYPE(5)-34-18 – Paper to note 2

#### **3.3 Letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education – eligibility criteria for free school meals**

(Pages 27 – 29)

Attached Documents:

CYPE(5)-34-18 – Paper to note 3

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

(11.15)

**5 Inquiry into the status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification –  
consideration of the evidence**

(11.15 – 11.30)

Document is Restricted

### Introduction

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ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Assembly for Wales' Children, Young People and Education Committee's Inquiry into the Status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. ColegauCymru represents the 13<sup>1</sup> further education (FE) colleges and FE institutions in Wales<sup>2</sup> and exists to promote the public benefit of post compulsory education and learning.

### Response

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1. ColegauCymru is supportive of the baccalaureate approach to study with its emphasis on encouraging learners to be more responsible for their own learning, developing their own projects and interests, while drawing on teaching and learning staff more in their capacity as supervisors or mentors than sources of facts. However, in practice, the baccalaureate approach has sometimes become separated from the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.
2. In drawing together the response to this inquiry, several colleges noted that they had already provided evidence to the Qualifications Wales Review of the design and assessment model of the Skills Challenge Certificate and its place within the Welsh Baccalaureate, published in April 2018.
3. For the purpose of this enquiry, ColegauCymru would ask that the difference between the importance of encompassing holistic learning and the methods of specific model of assessing learning outcomes is not lost.

**The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is understood and valued by learners, parents, education professionals in schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers.**

4. The ongoing and long-lasting debate over the value of the WBQ suggests that it is not well understood across the range of interest groups. Naturally, it takes a certain period of time for change to become established and understood and Qualifications Wales are working to promote understanding of WBQ. There is a need to raise awareness of the baccalaureate approach, which is related to, but not synonymous with, the WBQ.
5. Most learners who come directly from schools in Wales have a detailed understanding of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ). Some learners and parents value this qualification and recognise the potential it has to enrich the curriculum and provide learners with wider skills. To a great extent, the attitude of the learner depends on their previous experience with WBQ, and this has not always been positive. A significant minority of learners

who have undertaken the WBQ previously have had negative experiences of delivery of this qualification and have negative perceptions about it. Many learners also feel that the qualification is repetitive in its structure. A number of learners and their parents would prefer the option to undertake an additional A Level rather than the WBQ.

6. Many parents do not understand the WBQ and so do not value the qualification. This is slowly changing but more work needs to be done to raise the profile of the qualification. Some colleges reported that when meeting parents, the value of WBQ is not initially recognised. However, when staff set the qualification in the context of higher education and employment, parents generally develop a more positive view. This means that WBQ requires specific promotion from college staff. To this end, we note that Qualifications Wales maintains a role for the promotion of its regulated qualifications and that this role includes promotion of the WBQ. Specific enquires should be made by the committee of the remit of this role and the main findings that have emerged.
7. Education professionals at some colleges noted that they value the breadth of the Advanced WBQ and the opportunities it affords learners to develop understanding and skills and wider experience of citizenship, alongside academic study. The extended project introduces learners to valuable higher- level research skills supporting their transition into higher education. Colleges reported that many learners use the extended project to support their personal statements and application to universities.
8. It should be noted that according to our enquiries, the national and foundation level post 16 WBQ are increasingly not delivered by further education colleges due to the heavy burden of assessment and workload for achievement of this qualification in one year. Otherwise, this takes place in addition to delivering the main vocational qualifications with controlled assessments, in many cases resit GCSEs, or the wider development of remedial as well as applied essential skills. ColegauCymru believes as a matter of policy as well as of practice FEIs should be allowed and encouraged to determine the best curriculum offer for learners.
9. Some colleges report finding that learners entering college have a negative view of the qualification and have received feedback that learners are choosing providers where they do not have to study the WBQ. Colleges who have campuses near the border with England have anecdotal evidence of learners who have chosen to study elsewhere, including in England, as they do not want to study WBQ. This feedback comes from some parents too. These colleges argue that WBQ has affected their learner recruitment. In the absence of identifiable research, ColegauCymru would suggest that

this is a topic the committee pursue in more detail.

10. It appears that employers have a patchy understanding of the WBQ at best and do not really appreciate that the qualification is aimed at improving the learners' skills to make them more employable. Network Rail, Sports Wales, National Museum have been supportive but more successful case studies are required to showcase the added value the WBQ can bring in terms of employability skills.
11. Based on the feedback we have received, the WBQ appears to have an uncertain status across the higher education sector with no consistency of understanding. It is becoming more accepted in universities which is positive for a number of learners. The understanding and value of the WBQ is growing in the higher education sector. However, more work needs to be done to raise its profile. Cardiff and Bristol both Russell Group Universities, for example, are now publicly accepting of the WBQ. It would be helpful if more case studies existed as examples of where the WBQ has helped to secure university placements. It is important to note that the inclusion of the WBQ on the UCAS application system does not necessarily mean that it is welcomed by prospective institutions.
12. Other colleges reported confusion among learners and parents regarding the difference between the Skills Challenge Certificate and the Advanced WBQ, as well as with the grading structure: and how the use of Distinction, Merit and Pass for the Challenges converts into an A\*-E grade.
13. There is a general view that publicity and public awareness needs to be increased.

**The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate is considered by learners, education professionals in schools and colleges, employers and higher education to be an equivalent, rigorous qualification.**

14. There was no clear agreement about the extent to which WBQ was generally accepted as being a rigorous qualification. Its value can be undermined by negative perceptions of different groups but some colleges felt that it was not seen as rigorous or the equivalent to a mainstream qualification and often still felt like a 'bolt on'. A key issue is finding ways to use the qualification to enhance core vocational studies as opposed to feeling like repetition of work achieved elsewhere
15. In some colleges, WBQ is delivered as a compulsory qualification for all Level 3 learners and has the same value placed on it as an A level or vocational main qualification. Certain colleges emphasised their regular professional training sessions for teaching staff and the hard work they had put in to ensure that WBQ is valued by all.
16. Building on the response to the previous question, HEIs have a highly variable response and understanding of the rigour of the Advanced WBQ,

particularly now that this qualification is graded. Some universities see the positive benefits of the qualification and accept it as an A Level equivalent. Other universities have different approaches with colleges reporting variability between departments and admissions tutors, including the WBQ being given UCAS points matching the English extended essay (even though this is a far smaller qualification) or not being accepted at all. The extent to which these practices are based on the perception of its rigour should be explored in more depth particular with the awarding body.

**The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in schools and colleges, including the Welsh Government's target for universal adoption and the potential impact of this approach.**

17. Learning needs to be tailored to the needs of the learner and a compulsory approach risks contradicting much of the baccalaureate principle. The tendency is currently to move away from universal adoption and to offer routes that do not necessarily include the WBQ; many colleges are choosing to reduce their delivery of the WBQ. This is partly due to the issues that have been identified through the review of the qualification by Qualifications Wales, resulting in the WBQ not being fit for purpose for the many FE learners. As there is a lot of negativity associated with the WBQ by school leavers who often do not want to study this qualification, this has to be countered and must not continue to be a barrier to further academic or vocational study.
18. There is great deal of concern about universal adoption and whether both the functioning of the qualification and its delivery by the sector is sufficiently robust. Until more of the problems identified have been resolved, universal adoption does not seem a sensible approach. Universal adoption of Level 3 could potentially work but there are more concerns about Foundation and National levels. Advanced WBQ is over two years and is a useful qualification to support progression into employment and higher-level study. It is currently felt to particularly complement A Level programmes and enriches the curriculum for these learners.
19. Universal adoption is not practical for all FE learners in college as the National and Foundation WBQs are not practical to be delivered for these one-year programmes. Learners on Level 1 and 2 courses undertaking these qualifications invariably also have to undertake resit English and Maths GCSE qualifications in this year. These assessments, in conjunction with more vocational qualifications with strict controlled assessments, means that the WBQ at these levels is, in effect, undeliverable. One college suggested potentially removing the requirement for GCSE Maths, English/Welsh at Level 1 and 2: initial pilots of the Post 16 Foundation and National WBQ allowed for contextualised literacy and numeracy development within the vocational areas.



20. When some colleges trialled the qualifications in 2015/16, there was a significant dip in retention. Some learners left due to the heavy workload and stress caused and from disengagement as they wanted to do a practical vocational course. There is a need to take account of the best interests of learners, including what learners want to study and what will best engage them.
21. In order to gain the WBQ Advanced qualification, at the end of two years of study, learners must have achieved their main qualification and Maths, English/Welsh GCSE (at C or above) and the Skills Challenge certificate. For many learners, this is too great a challenge. The WBQ is a valuable programme of study, but it is not suitable for all learners to pursue. Some colleges report having had learners state that they will leave rather than undertake the WBQ alongside their main qualifications.

#### **The wider impact of studying the Welsh Baccalaureate on other curriculum subjects and education provision.**

22. As a general consideration, the WBQ and evaluations of it have focused narrowly on A Levels. Given the nature of the delivery of learning via the Learning Programmes, greater consideration needs to be given to how WBQ fits with vocational learners and courses and making it relevant to these learners. One college did, however, highlight good practice examples of lecturers integrating the four skills challenges into the main vocational qualification.
23. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many learners are focusing on two A Levels and the WBQ rather than three A Levels which can have an impact on higher level study. The WBQ has resulted in a higher proportion of A Level learners choosing to study fewer AS subjects (or withdrawing from AS subjects) so that they can manage the additional workload of the WBQ qualification.
24. The issue of whether there is scope for the Skills Challenges to be accredited more individually was raised. Some learners who study a 90 credit Diploma in Year 1, complete two of the Skills Challenges but then decide to go into Employment/Apprenticeship. Similarly, some AS students decide to change to Vocational programmes or enter WBL having completed two of the Skills Challenges in the AS year.
25. Some colleges suggested that the WJEC Extended Project Qualification could be considered as a stand-alone option for high GCSE achievers who would prefer to study four AS subjects.
26. Many students and tutors (from other curriculum subjects) see the time

allocated to the WBQ, as time that could be spent on the main qualification. There needs to be a clear focus on, and understanding of, how the WBQ can improve the learners' skills and enhance their ability to progress. The size of the qualification can mean tutors have to use main qualification time for delivery which is not helpful. Some colleges suggested that WBQ needs a specialist team and asked if there should be a qualification for WBQ tutors, making them specialists in the facilitation the qualification requires.

27. Whilst the WBQ can be an enriching qualification for many learners, many colleges believe that it is not suitable for all learners and all education provision. For vocational subjects where there is a heavy reliance on practical skills for employment, the WBQ seems less relevant. These include curriculum areas that link heavily to work-based learning pathways and apprenticeships (i.e. construction, motor vehicle, hair and beauty, catering). Learners in these areas work to achieve technical competency in a skills and employment focused curriculum. The WBQ can disengage learners (many of whom have not been successful in schools and in academic learning previously). These areas also attract adult learners and this makes it very challenging to deliver an integrated curriculum as the WBQ is not suitable for adult learners wanting technical skills development. The impact of this may well be further disengagement of these learners from education, which brings wider impacts.

**The benefits and disadvantages of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification to learners, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers.**

28. At its best, over two years, the Advanced WBQ further enriches the A Level and Level 3 vocational curriculum and prepares learners well for the academic expectations of an academically-researched, extended writing project at university; and application to university and interviews for employment. If taught and structured correctly, the WBQ could support the learners with their skills to ensure purposeful progression.
29. Other benefits include the UCAS points attached to the Skills Challenge certificate, that the WBQ can provide evidence for personal statements, and in theory, should lead to well-rounded individuals who are more work-ready and able to meet the needs of employers. Some colleges recognised the WBQ offered the opportunity for development of employability skills which cannot be delivered as part of curriculum subjects
30. The Community Challenge supports learners in engaging with their communities. This can lead to them committing to extracurricular activities outside college, which enhances them as a person and also enhances applications for employment and university.
31. One of the disadvantages of the WBQ is that it is still not universally accepted by all universities. The WBQ often takes the place of a fourth A

Level, so this potentially disadvantages learners where the WBQ is not accepted. Likewise, the format of the WBQ can seem repetitive for learners who have undertaken the qualification previously at different levels and pre-16.

32. The WBQ is not as relevant to learners on very practical skills-based qualifications that lead into work-based learning pathways and the academic outputs and assessments can disengage them from learning. It is difficult to implement the WBQ where there are classes of adult learners and 16-19 year old learners undertaking the same programme of study.
33. As referenced earlier, the national and foundation levels are impractical to implement in one year and create a huge burden of assessment as learners have complete the WBQ work and resit GCSEs, in addition to their main programme (in half the allocated time of the advanced programme). As a result, very few colleges undertake the WBQ at these levels. More widely, there is often too great a focus on the challenges rather than skills development.
34. The heavy assessment requirements at Advanced Level WBQ has often resulted in learners studying fewer A Level subjects. This has affected their progression opportunities (negatively) in some cases and has also had unintended consequences on curriculum.
35. The length of the WBQ year means that it can be difficult for some learners to complete the challenges by the deadlines in mid-May.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee on your Inquiry into the status of the Welsh BaccaLaureate Qualification.

In case you are unaware of our organisation and the interest we have in this inquiry I should stress that we represent the majority of Wales' largest and smallest civil engineering contracting businesses who employ over 6,000 people directly, as well as many others through extended supply chains. These businesses play a huge part in supporting communities across Wales and with a cumulative annual turnover in excess of £1bn they make a significant contribution to the economic prosperity of our nation. They are also major providers of training and apprenticeship opportunities and rely heavily on employing school and college leavers to enable them to build the infrastructure that our nation needs to prosper. The quality of the skills, behaviours and work readiness of these individuals is of huge importance to these businesses.

I note that your inquiry will focus specifically on:

- The extent to which the Welsh BaccaLaureate Qualification is understood and valued by learners, parents, education professionals in schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers;
- The extent to which the Welsh BaccaLaureate is considered by learners, education professionals in schools and colleges, employers and higher education to be an equivalent, rigorous qualification;
- The status of the Welsh BaccaLaureate Qualification in schools and colleges, including the Welsh Government's target for universal adoption and the potential impact of this approach;
- The wider impact of studying the Welsh BaccaLaureate on other curriculum subjects and education provision;
- The benefits and disadvantages of the Welsh BaccaLaureate Qualification to learners, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers.

I will focus my response on each of these issues in turn.

1. *The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification is understood and valued by learners, parents, education professionals in schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers*

There remains a significant lack of awareness and understanding of the qualification in the civil engineering contracting sector and, therefore, it is difficult to assess the value of the qualification to these employers. The lack of understanding and awareness could be due to a lack of engagement with employers during its development and launch combined with a very poor response by schools and colleges to the qualification. My perception is that far too many schools do not value the qualification due to its vocational nature, particularly those preparing learners for academic progression, and as a result do not dedicate high quality teachers to the subject. This lack of value attached to it by schools and colleges also hinders the ability to positively promote the qualification amongst learners, parents and employers - effectively creating a vicious and downward spiralling circle. However, those employers who, for a variety of reasons, have a better understanding of the qualification do value it as they recognise the skills and behaviours that are cultivated by the qualification are the very things that employers need in their workforce.

2. *The extent to which the Welsh Baccalaureate is considered by learners, education professionals in schools and colleges, employers and higher education to be an equivalent, rigorous qualification*

Based on my earlier response that far too many employers have a limited awareness and understanding of the Welsh Bacc it is unlikely that those employers could realistically value a qualification that they know so little about. However, those that have a good understanding do value the qualification as it meets many of their needs which are not necessarily delivered through other more “traditional/academic” qualifications. I believe that if more employers understand what the qualification can do more would value it and actively promote it.

From a parent’s perspective, whilst I have a good understanding and do value it I know of many parents who don’t and some who actively discourage their children to follow the qualification as they feel it is neither rigorous nor equivalent. I suspect this view will be difficult to change without positive promotion via the education sector - which would need them to value it first.

For the reasons stated above I do not feel that the qualification is viewed by sufficient schools and colleges as being rigorous and equivalent and reflects a deep-seated obsession with academic routes and qualifications as opposed to vocational subjects. I believe this is a significant cultural issue that needs to be challenged within the educational sector.

3. *The status of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in schools and colleges, including the Welsh Government’s target for universal adoption and the potential impact of this approach*

Unless the value of the Welsh Bacc is “sold” to employers, parents and learners (in that order) then it will always suffer from lower status compared to more traditional subjects. If this is not addressed then universal adoption will exacerbate the current situation. However, from an employers perspective, as long as the subject is accepted by those in education and well promoted to employers I would wish to see it universally adopted.

I am unable to comment on the impact within schools and colleges of its universal adoption but, given pressures on resources and the cultural favouring of academic qualifications over vocational qualifications, I suspect that fewer resources and energies will be devoted to the Welsh Bacc sadly. This approach will continue to favour academic over vocational “achievers” and disadvantage a high proportion of learners in Wales who, potentially, have significant contributions to make to our future prosperity and wellbeing.

**4. *The wider impact of studying the Welsh Baccalaureate on other curriculum subjects and education provision***

From an employers perspective it is difficult to comment on this point as we do not work in this environment. However, the skills and behaviours promoted through the Welsh Bacc, if presented by higher quality teachers, potentially supported by employers, should underpin work on other subjects, help to create more “rounded” individuals and help to make learners far more “work ready”. The perception from many parents and learners, I suspect, would be that another subject, that they may view as being less rigorous, less equivalent, lower value and lower status, would impact on progress in other “higher value” subjects. I would challenge this perception but it will need significant efforts to change these perceptions.

**5. *The benefits and disadvantages of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification to learners, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers***

In terms of benefits and disadvantages this needs to be viewed against what we expect our schools and colleges to deliver. If it is to “churn out” learners with as many academic qualifications as possible but with limited “work readiness” then arguably the Welsh Bacc does not suit this model. However, if we recognise that the academic route is not suitable for everyone and that “work readiness” is important, along with practical skills and workplace behaviours, even for those pursuing academic routes, then the Welsh Bacc, in my view, is essential.

**Summary**

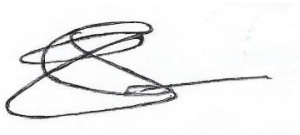
In summary, my response is based on an employers perspective but with an awareness, from a parents perspective, of what the Welsh Bacc is and what it can offer.

My overall feeling is that engagement with employers has not been conducted particularly well, or in many cases, at all, and so many remain unaware of the Welsh Bacc and what it can offer. However, what is clear is that the content of the Welsh Bacc is very well suited to the needs of employers in the civil engineering contracting sector (and, I suspect, for other employers) and is valued by those who understand it better. Its vocational nature with a focus on practical skills and business as well as softer skills and behaviours are the kind of requirements which are constantly flagged up by our members, very often above academic and technical achievements (which are easier to assess and tend to be taken as “givens” for certain roles).

For employers, particularly in the infrastructure/construction sector, the Welsh Bacc offers a very important route to gain “work ready” employees with far greater exposure to the skills and behaviours needed to thrive in a commercial and business environment. There are already significant opportunities for employers to be engaged in delivering the Welsh Bacc in schools and colleges but these opportunities are not being fully exploited despite the social requirements of many construction contracts and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments of many employers. If these commitments could be harnessed in parallel with a concerted effort by government, local and national, and schools and colleges, to promote the value of the Welsh Bacc to parents and employers then I believe we could fully realise its potential to support our future employees. To lose this qualification would be a significant step back in harnessing the skills of all our learners - not just those of an academic persuasion.

I trust that these views and observations are helpful to you and your Committee but please contact me should you wish to discuss these matters in greater detail.

Yours sincerely



**Ed Evans**  
Director, CECA Wales/Cymru

Huw Irranca-Davies AC/AM  
Y Gweinidog Plant, Pobl Hŷn a Gofal Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/ Our Ref: MA - L/HID/0692/18

Lynne Neagle AM  
Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee  
[SeneddCYPE@assembly.wales](mailto:SeneddCYPE@assembly.wales)  
National Assembly for Wales  
Ty Hywel  
Cardiff CF99 1NA

20 November 2018

Dear Lynne,

## Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill

In my response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee following Stage 1 scrutiny of the Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill, I said I would commission a piece of internal work to examine further the various schemes available to parents to help them with childcare, outside of the parameters of this Bill, with a view to reducing any confusion and complexity. This in particular was in response to recommendation 7 where I believe there to be other support programmes in place designed specifically for parents in training and education or for those who require support to return to work, but possibly these were not as clear as they could be.

I would like to make you aware of the following childcare support, particularly for parents in training and education.

- **Work-Based Learning Support** - There is currently support for non-employed learners through work-based learning support. The support is available to trainees to cover a range of costs, including transport, accommodation, additional learning support and childcare. Support is available to lone parents, who can receive up to a maximum of £161.50 per week for the first child or £274.55 per week for two or more children. Registered childcare settings must be used. This programme is due to end on 31 March 2019 to be replaced by the Working Wales programme which will continue to provide support for non-employed learners. However, the rate of funding for childcare will increase to a maximum of £225 per week for one child (with a daily limit of £45) and £375 per week for two or more children (with a daily limit of £75).

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

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

[Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales)

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

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



- **Further Education** - The Financial Contingency Fund<sup>1</sup> (FCF) is £6.3million of Welsh Government funding (maintained since 2014/15) accessible to those attending public-funded further education (FE) institutions in Wales. It's administered by the FE institutions, as grants or short term loans, and aims to provide financial help to students whose access to education beyond statutory school leaving age might be inhibited by financial considerations or who face financial difficulties during their studies. The terms of the scheme are made as broad as possible to enable FE institutions as much flexibility as possible so they are able to tailor assistance to the need of the learner. The scheme identifies *students who need help with childcare costs, especially lone parents* as one of the priority groups. The largest areas of expenditure are childcare, transport and lunch vouchers. In 2016/17 (the latest year for which we have statistics) 901 awards were made to student parents to help with childcare costs amounting to £2.7million.

In 2016 Arad Research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake independent research into the extent to which childcare is a barrier to young parents entering, returning to, or continuing with further education in Wales. The research found that whilst childcare provision is one of a number of challenges or barriers faced by young parents who wish to access or continue in FE in Wales, the current discretionary funding arrangements appear to meet the needs of FE parent learners. As such, and based on the evidence reviewed from various sources, they concluded that an additional pilot programme was not required at that moment in time.<sup>2</sup>

- **Higher Education** - The childcare grant<sup>3</sup> is available to full and part-time students accessing higher education who have dependent children under-15 years of age (or 17 in the case of children with special educational needs). Although funded by Welsh Government, the grant is administered by Student Finance Wales, and is dependent on the financial position of the applicant. Students can receive up to a maximum of £161.50 per week for the first child or £274.55 per week for two or more children. Part-time students will receive a pro-rata childcare grant based on intensity of study. Higher education institutions in Wales also operate their own discretionary hardship funds for students. The institutions award support to help with a range of costs associated with studying, including childcare.
- **NHS Wales Bursary Scheme** –In Wales the NHS Wales Bursary Scheme supports students who elect to study an approved healthcare programme within Wales. There is an NHS Wales Childcare Allowance as part of this enhanced package based on 85% of the actual registered or approved childcare costs up to a maximum amount. From September 2014, for one child the maximum payable is £128.78 per week. For two or more children the maximum payable is £209.95 per week. However, every childcare allowance is calculated individually and the amount awarded will depend on individual circumstances and the income available to the family. The NHS Wales Bursary arrangements have recently been the subject of a consultation which will inform future arrangements. The current review will look at all aspects of the current package of support including support for childcare.

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<sup>1</sup> Individual FE colleges promote the Fund on their own websites

<sup>2</sup> <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/childcare-further-education/?lang=en>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-students/part-time-students/new-students/childcare-grant.aspx>

It is also worth noting that, for those in training or studying full-time, they can make a new Universal Credit claim if any of the following apply:

- If they live with your partner and they're eligible for Universal Credit
- If they're responsible for a child, either as a single person or as a couple, if both of you are students
- If they're disabled and entitled to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and have limited capability for work
- If they're in 'non-advanced education' (for example studying for A levels or a BTEC National Diploma), are 21 or under and do not have parental support

For those parents who require childcare support to return to work there is:

- **Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE)** is a £13.5m ESF and Welsh Government funded programme aimed at helping economically inactive/NEET parents into work where childcare is their main barrier. Parents receive individualised help via a Parent Employment Adviser in their local community and the programme provides assistance in covering the costs of childcare for parents accessing work experience, education or training, and also for 2 weeks after they start work to help with the transition into employment.

Since July 2015, PaCE has worked with over 3400 parents, and has helped over 1100 of those into work. The costs of childcare have varied according to the needs of each parent. There is a maximum cost of £55 per day / £275 per week for one child or £90 per day/£450 per week for more than one child. PaCE are able to fund higher costs for any children with additional needs.

So far, 590 parents have received financial support through PaCE for their children to access registered childcare. This support has enabled parents to undertake training, work experience or volunteering opportunities to increase confidence and employability skills, which have improved their chances of moving into sustainable employment. PaCE has paid over £400,000 in childcare costs, not only supporting parents prepare for work, but also helping them make the transition into employment for the first few weeks

An evaluation to consider the impact of PaCE has been commissioned and the first report is due to be published later this year, which will include feedback from parents on how PaCE supported them into work, and how childcare was addressed to meet their needs. Discussions are ongoing with the Wales European Funding Office regarding extending the PaCE project beyond 2020. Advice will be provided to the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning and the Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care during November.

- **Communities for Work (CfW)** is a community based advisory service, supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) and co-sponsored by DWP, working with long term unemployed and economically inactive adults and 16-24 year olds not in employment education or training. CfW has been extended until 2020 and will provide £70.5m in employment support services in the most deprived communities in Wales until December 2020. CfW provides delivery teams with funding to support participants overcome barriers to employment or training, this includes the

cost of short term childcare. To date CfW has supported 165 requests for childcare support amounting to £17,602. Discussions are ongoing with the Wales European Funding Office regarding extending the CfW project beyond 2020. Advice will be provided to the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning during November.

- **Communities for Work Plus (CfW+)** is a £12m per annum Welsh Government funded programme introduced from 1 April 2018 to extend employability support to people not eligible for CfW, PaCE or other regional ESF programmes. CfW+ provides delivery teams with funding to support participants, including the cost of short term childcare whilst undertaking training. Discussions are ongoing with the Minister for Welsh Language and Lifelong Learning regarding extending the CfW+ project beyond 2020. Advice will be provided to the Minister during November.
- From April 2019, **Working Wales** will also be able to support unemployed or economically inactive people through a new approach to delivering employability and skills support, designed to assist people into work by addressing their barriers to employment. Non-employed participants receiving support through Working Wales will be entitled to apply for a contribution towards childcare costs if this is a barrier to attending provision. Working Wales must be delivered, where possible, within the hours to suit the participant, but where this cannot be met, or no alternative support can be identified, support towards childcare costs will be considered.

Alongside the support highlighted above, it is also important to remember other flagship programmes which are not related to a parent's work status or whether or not they are training and education.

From the term after a child turns 2 eligible families living in **Flying Start** areas can access 12.5 hours a week of government funded childcare during term time in allocated local settings, 39 weeks a year, plus up to 15 'family sessions' in the summer holiday period. The programme is geographically targeted, and Flying Start areas include some of the most deprived communities in Wales. Its strength is that it integrates high quality childcare, health visiting, parenting programmes and speech and language in a child centred approach. It is currently available to more than 37,000 children living within specific geographical boundaries of highest need. We know this equates to around 25% of all 0-3 year olds in Wales. It is targeted on areas of deprivation and we estimate it reaches between 36-44% of 0-3 year olds living in poverty.

In addition, every 3 and 4 year old child can access free part-time **Foundation Phase** nursery education<sup>4</sup> before they enter compulsory education at the age of 5. Local authorities are required to provide an early education place from the term after a child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://beta.gov.wales/foundation-phase-nursery-guide-parents-and-carers>

As I have said to Committee previously, we have a number of childcare support programmes in place for parents who are in training and education and for parents who need support to return to work, and the internal piece of work undertaken underlines and reinforces that.

I do however, appreciate that the information for people to understand what support is available may not be collectively presented in the clearest of ways. I have asked my officials to look at how we can better communicate and raise awareness of what's out there, including working with Family Information Services who are providing a wide range of local information, advice and assistance to families, including information about childcare and related services. I would welcome suggestions the Committee's may have around this.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Huw', with a horizontal line underneath it.

**Huw Irranca-Davies AC/AM**

Y Gweinidog Plant, Pobl Hŷn a Gofal Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Children, Older People and Social Care

Kirsty Williams AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref  
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/02585/18  
Sally Holland  
Children's Commissioner for Wales

Ceirios.Williams@childcomwales.org.uk

20 November 2018

Dear Sally,

With reference to your letter of 9 November to the First Minister regarding Elective Home Education, I have been asked to respond.

The Welsh Government shares your view that all children in Wales should be accounted for and this clearly stretches wider than the educational remit. We have instigated cross departmental work to develop and deliver policy that will support systems which increase routine contact between public services and children. This work will also include multi agency procedures to ensure that where a child is not seen by public services this prompts an appropriate and proportionate safeguarding response.

In terms of elective home education proposals as I have previously stated, the primary policy intent is to ensure that home educated children in Wales receive a suitable education. In order for the local authority to satisfy itself of the suitability of education provision by the parents it is reasonable in most cases for the local authority see the child. Where families refuse the local authority access to see the child then the local authority will need to consider if it can conclude a child is receiving a suitable education. If not, then the local authority already has powers to issue school attendance order (SAO). The statutory guidance will make clear the expectations on local authorities in these circumstances. If a local authority is of the view there is a safeguarding issue they should, as now, follow existing safeguarding procedures.

The statutory guidance being developed will outline activities the local authority can undertake to identify children and young people of compulsory school age not currently known to them. The right for children and young people to be seen and listened to is a

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

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

[Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales)

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

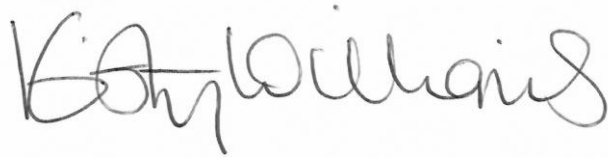
We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

fundamental one and local authorities will be encouraged to make every effort to ensure that home educated children have access to the same levels of support and opportunities as those in mainstream school as well as have the opportunity to share their views regarding the education they are receiving.

To be clear, these proposals will not provide local authorities with new powers. Rather, in addition to providing statutory guidance to local authorities to enable them to establish the identities of children who are not receiving suitable education, it will make it clear what existing powers local authorities have at their disposal and will strongly reinforce the expectation that these powers will be utilised appropriately in order to ensure that those children do receive a suitable education.

The EHE stakeholder group has three meetings scheduled between now and the launch of the formal consultation. These meetings will provide an opportunity for sharing the draft guidance and promoting discussion on its content prior to the consultation. Following a clearly set legislative process the intention is that the new regulations and statutory guidance will come into force in March 2020. The coming into force date reflects the work that will need to happen post consultation; including updating the statutory guidance and regulations following an analysis of the responses, but also amending the various assessments and the regulatory impact assessment. I will also be seeking Cabinet approval on the final regulations and statutory guidance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams'.

**Kirsty Williams AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Kirsty Williams AC/AM  
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref MA-P KW/3815/18

Lynne Neagle AM  
Chair  
Children, Young People and Education Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1NA

22 November 2018

Dear Lynne,

Thank you for your letter of 24 October 2018. I have set out responses to each of the questions you raised below.

- ***How did the Welsh Government decide on a net annual income threshold of £7,400?***

Our primary consideration is that those most in need should be entitled to free school meals. It is also essential that our proposals are affordable and represent effective use of public money. It is important to note no additional funding has been provided to the Welsh Government to manage the impact of the UK Government's Welfare Reform agenda on free school meals.

Following analysis of the potential impact of a number of annualised net earned income thresholds, we believe the most appropriate threshold to be £7,400, given the above considerations. Our most up-to-date analysis suggests that more children will be eligible for free school meals throughout the Universal Credit roll out period because of this policy than otherwise would have been under the old legacy system.

A typical family earning around £7,400 per annum would, depending on their exact circumstances, have a total household income of between £18,000 and £24,000 once benefits are taken into account. Therefore, the net earnings amount does not represent a household's total income as it does not include income from benefits, which significantly increase a household's overall income.

A further important consideration for the Welsh Government is to ensure that any change to free school meals eligibility criteria would cause the minimum possible amount of disruption. Our proposals therefore also include transitional protection so that pupils eligible for free school meals when the criteria are changed, or any new claimants who

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

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

[Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Kirsty.Williams@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Kirsty.Williams@gov.wales)

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

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gain free school meals during the rollout of Universal Credit (currently expected to be completed by December 2023), will be protected against losing them until the rollout is complete, even if their eligibility changes.

Once the rollout is complete, any existing free school meal claimants who no longer meet the eligibility criteria (because they are earning above the threshold) will continue to receive protection until the end of their current phase of education (e.g. primary, secondary).

We will be keeping the threshold under review to ensure those most in need are receiving free school meals.

- ***Did the Welsh Government consider any other thresholds, for example £14,000 as in Northern Ireland?***

The [Summary of a Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment](#), published as part of the consultation, considered three policy options as follows:

- **Maintain the status quo.** This would mean that the temporary blanket free school meal eligibility criteria for all Universal Credit claimants would remain. Our analysis indicates that by the time Universal Credit is fully rolled out, around half of all pupils would be eligible for free school meals (compared to 16 per cent in January 2018). This would be unaffordable.
- **Introduce an annualised net earnings threshold of £6,200.** We estimated this to be broadly cohort (and cost) neutral by the time Universal Credit is fully rolled out.
- **Introduce an annualised net earnings threshold of £7,400.** This was our preferred option for the reasons set out above.

Although policy for free school meal eligibility in Northern Ireland is also devolved, comparison between Wales and Northern Ireland should be treated with caution. Under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, social security (welfare) is devolved to Northern Ireland. Even before the introduction of a net earned income threshold of £14,000, the eligibility criteria for free school meals were different to those in Wales. One of the main differences is that families in Northern Ireland who are in receipt of Working Tax Credit with an annual income below £16,190 are eligible to claim free school meals for their children. However, in Wales families in receipt of Working Tax Credit are not eligible for free school meals. A straightforward comparison between the free school meal eligibility criteria in Northern Ireland and in Wales is therefore not possible, as you are not comparing like with like.

- ***How many more pupils does the Welsh Government estimate would be eligible for free school meals if a net annual income threshold of £14,000 was applied and what would be the additional costs of this?***

We expect the eligible free school meals cohort (and therefore the annual costs not including the protections) to be around twice the size under an annualised net earned income threshold of £14,000 compared to a threshold of £7,400 once Universal Credit is fully rolled out

- ***What implications would the adoption of a higher threshold than the proposed £7,400 have on eligibility for the Pupil Development Grant and associated costs?***

Eligibility for the Pupil Development Grant is based on the number of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. If we were to adopt a higher net earned income threshold



than £7,400, this would increase the number of pupils entitled to free school meals and result in an increase in the number of pupils entitled to the Pupil Development Grant. I announced in March that we were fixing the Pupil Development Grant allocations of schools for the current and next financial years; the potential change in numbers eligible for free school meals was an important part of the rationale underpinning this decision.

Changes in the number of pupils eligible for free school meals will impact on a number of other policy areas such as the distribution of local authority funding and the way in which we use eligibility for free school meals to measure the attainment levels of pupils from deprived backgrounds. Before making a decision about new eligibility criteria for free school meals, I need to consider the responses to our recent public consultation and any wider implications. I will keep the Committee updated.

I will issue a Written Statement shortly to set out our next steps, to include information on timescales.

Yours sincerely

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

**Kirsty Williams AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg  
Cabinet Secretary for Education