

Kirsty Williams AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref: P-05-1147
Ein cyf/Our ref: KW/01328/21

Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair
Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

5 March 2021

Dear Janet,

Thank you for your correspondence in relation to P-05-1147, which refers to the requirement for all schools to provide daily live / recorded teaching to all pupils not returning to school.

I appreciate that there is no direct substitute for face-to-face learning, and that we have all had to adapt in these challenging times and consider different ways of learning. We have put in place a range of measures to support remote learning including extensive professional learning, significant investment in devices and the enhanced £29 million Accelerating Learning Programme to [recruit, recover and raise standards](#) in Welsh schools.

Although the responsibility for the delivery of learning remains with local authorities and schools, they are encouraged to engage with the most appropriate models of delivery based on their individual requirements and their learners' needs. Following feedback from schools and local authorities, Welsh Government updated its guidance on 07 January to remove the number of practitioners required for live streaming to allow for local flexibility and decision-making (more information is available on the link below).

[Live-streaming and video-conferencing: safeguarding principles and practice](#)

When developing their approach to live-streaming, schools must undertake a risk assessment and review their safeguarding processes and procedures to ensure the safety and security of their learners and staff. Schools should also continue to have due regard to the updated guidance to ensure effective safeguarding, which remains an integral principle of digital learning.

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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.

Wales is very well placed to support schools, practitioners and learners during this period as we have [Hwb](#), our national digital platform for learning and teaching. Hwb provides its users with access to a range of free bilingual, digital tools and resources. Our [distance learning support on Hwb](#) includes resources to support distance learning activities as well as links to advice on health and well-being. The Welsh Government's Hwb platform is also accessible to learners via Xbox and PlayStation:

https://twitter.com/WG_Education/status/1323691431626760192?s=20

I recognise the ongoing challenges facing all learners and their families as a result of the pandemic. We have recently established a Blended Learning Working Group, consisting of officers from Welsh Government, local authorities and the regional consortia, tasked with addressing issues of equity of access to learning in future periods of disruption and will seek to engage parent and learner voice. We welcome feedback to improve future distanced support for learners via YouTube, and will share any thoughts that we receive with this group. In addition, you may be aware that some TV channels are already offering additional support for learners during home learning including [BBC](#) and [S4C](#).

Please let me assure you that I understand that the past few months have been stressful and challenging for many learners and I recognise the impact that the pandemic has had, and continues to have, on our learners. It is clear that many learners have not progressed their learning as much as they would have, and we know the impacts have not been uniform, as the disruption has disproportionately affected some learners.

We are exploring what additional measures we can take to address lost learning time and we are working closely with our education partners to develop these measures, and will in due course publish a Learning Recovery Plan to set these out in detail. All options are currently under consideration including a phased return, implementing rotas and adjusting term dates. Many of the options being considered are to ensure that schools are also able to adhere to school operations.

The Learning Recovery Plan will set out both our long-term plans to support all learners to recover from the pandemic, and will consider how we can support those specific groups, such as those in exam years, that have been most affected by the disruption. As part of this plan, we will consider actions and support for learner and teacher well-being, as we recognise that these are key enablers of learning and are fundamental to recovery.

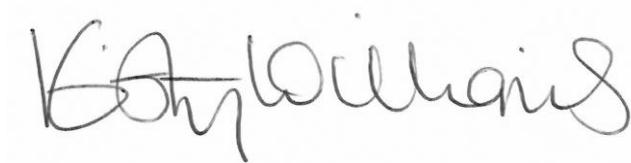
You will be aware of the recent announcements we have made in relation to a cautious, staggered return to in-school learning, starting with our youngest learners from 22 February with the aim for all primary school children to return to face-to-face learning together with some older learners, such as years 11 and 13 in schools and those doing qualifications in colleges, who will return on a blended learning basis from 15 March, there would also be flexibility for some learners in year 10 and 12 to return.

In addition, I announced on 03 March [plans for more pupils](#) in Wales to have the opportunity to return to the classroom ahead of the Easter break. She confirmed that schools will be given the opportunity to welcome back learners in years 7, 8 and 9. The aim is to give learners the opportunity to check in with teachers, with a focus on support for wellbeing and readiness for a full return to school after the Easter holidays. Schools will have some flexibility in terms of how they choose to implement this and it may take a few days before they are in position to communicate their plans to parents and learners.

These decision are, as always, based on the latest medical and scientific advice available, which in this instance includes updates from both Technical Advisory Group, which published a [paper](#) on 05 February in which they advised that the improvement in the public health situation allows us to consider a “partial and phased return to face-to-face learning in schools” and [advice](#) provided to the First Minister by Dr Frank Atherton, our Chief Medical Officer.

The Welsh Government’s priority during this pandemic continues to be the safety and welfare of students, school staff and the wider community, as well as the continuing education of our learners. In the meantime, therefore, my officials and I will continue to works with all of our delivery partners to ensure that learners are receiving the best possible learning provision within what continue to be extremely difficult circumstances.

Yours sincerely

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

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