

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

**CYPE SP 41**

**Ymateb gan: Claire Protheroe, Rheolwr Cenedlaethol Cymru, Y Gymdeithas Broffesiynol ar gyfer Gofal Plant a'r Blynyddoedd Cynnar (PACEY Cymru).**

**Response from: Claire Protheroe, National Manager for Wales, Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY Cymru).**

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Beth yn eich barn chi yw'r prif flaenoriaethau neu'r materion y dylai'r Pwyllgor eu hystyried yn ystod y Chweched Senedd? Os oes modd, nodwch eich barn o ran sut y gallai'r Pwyllgor fynd i'r afael â hyn.

What do you consider to be the main priorities or issues that the Committee should consider during the Sixth Senedd? Where possible, please set out your view about how the Committee could address them.

**Thema 1: Addysg oedran ysgol | Theme 1: School-age education**

**Thema 2: Addysg bellach ac addysg uwch | Theme 2: Further and higher education**

**Thema 3: Iechyd a lles, gan gynnwys gofal cymdeithasol (i'r graddau y maent yn ymwneud â phlant a phobl ifanc) | Theme 3: Health and well-being, including social care (as they relate to children and young people)**

Given that childcare sits under the social care umbrella and is regulated by Care Inspectorate Wales we have provided the majority of our views on priorities in this section. It should be noted however that there are links to the other themes within this proforma but to avoid repetition we have not added these to each section.

We recommend that the Committee focuses on:

1. Scrutinising developments in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including a) ECEC commitment b) childcare equity and parental choice, c) the decline in childminders in Wales specifically and d) professional registration



**a. That the committee supports a full commitment to the Early Childhood Education and Care approach and finding solutions at a national and local level to overcome the barriers that are long term and rooted in regulation and legislation.**

The work undertaken to date by Welsh Government officials has explored a number of key issues and provided intelligence on some of the barriers to both schools and childcare settings in offering both early childhood education and care. Some of these barriers are long term and rooted in regulation and legislation.

Welsh Government have made it clear that solutions need to be explored and identified at a national level by Welsh Government before delivery of ECEC provision can commence. Following the decision to stop the recent ECEC pilot in Bridgend, we would like to see the panel scrutinise the commitment to the ECEC approach and the barriers needing to be overcome to implement ECEC across Wales for all children. We want to see the reinforcement of a commitment to moving to this approach and revised plans and timescales for this.

The development of an ECEC approach in Wales will be key to widening opportunities available to childcare and early years providers in Wales around the delivery of funded services including Childcare Offer for Wales, Flying Start and Foundation Phase Nursery/New Curriculum funded places and will support the sector in COVID recovery while supporting the needs of children and their families.

ECEC can only be achieved with a clear commitment to the professionalisation of the childcare and playwork workforce as outlined in the Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce plan. We would like to see the panel commit to scrutinising the paid and perceived status of workers in this sector, making recommendations about steps towards a fully professionally recognised workforce with a status no less valued than that of educators and school support staff.

**b. That, in alignment with ECEC and in support of parental choice, we call on the committee to ensure the full spectrum of childcare providers is supported equitably.**

During the pandemic there have been unprecedented challenges for childcare settings, resulting in significant temporary closures noted through CIW data. The pattern of reopening is appearing to support the larger providers (full day care) over the smaller providers (childminders and voluntary managed settings). We call on the Panel to explore the data available from CIW (tracking records and SASS) alongside



working with umbrella organisations and Local Authorities to ensure that changes in work patterns, and economies of scale do not disadvantage the smaller providers. Significantly, the continued demise of childminders and smaller local settings impacts Wales' rural and less-populous communities disproportionately. Once closed, these settings frequently do not get replaced and lead to local childcare being lost to the community.

Additionally, we would advocate for the full range of services being available to any provider, including the opportunity to offer early education now or in the future, wherever they are located in Wales. Currently there are barriers to settings including local policies that make it harder to offer the full range of services to parents in the non-maintained education provision. The longer the inequity in service opportunity exists, the less likely it is that settings not currently offering early education will be able to in the future. Exploring the opportunities and challenges faced by the non-maintained settings in the offering services that are funded through Welsh Government and assessing whether the inconsistencies are satisfactory and promote free choice for parents equitably would enable the Panel to be assured that across all local areas the First Minister's words are the reality for parents. Working with the sector and ensuring that learning from the pandemic (both positive and negative) is used to build back better is of vital importance.

With ECEC being the long term ambition to support in the short term we would like to see greater scrutiny of commissioning process for Local Authorities in relation to funded childcare / education including the development of national guidance. This would support the diversity of the sector and parental choice and reduce barriers experienced by childcare settings.

### **c. Decline in childminding**

In line with the above there is a specific concern given the decline in registered childminders in Wales in recent years that is often masked by wider issues and growth in other areas of childcare in Wales. PACEY Cymru carried out research in 2017, 2018 and 2021 in relation to childminder de-registrations and issues continue. We have shared associated reports with Welsh Government on 'Pre- registration trends and research' in February 2021 and 'De-registration of childminders in Wales' in August 2021. Copies of these reports are available to the committee on request. In the Chief Inspector's Annual Report 19-20 from Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) it is stated that the number of child minders in Wales has fallen by nearly 18% since 2014 with the 20-21 Annual Report stating statistics around further decline. There is a



concern that there will continue to be a decline in coming months exacerbated by issues related to COVID-19.

Sustainability of existing, quality childcare is of importance to support the needs of children and their families, parental choice of provision and childcare in rural areas and has also come to the forefront given the implementation and growth of the Childcare Offer for Wales and the impact of the pandemic. The Childcare Offer for Wales has increased the need for quality, registered childcare to meet demand and so the decline in childminder numbers is likely to have a significant impact on childcare availability and accessibility. We have concerns that there will come a point when childminding is at a crisis point and unviable and recovery from this point will be too late.

PACEY Cymru recommend that the committee commit to further scrutiny and scoping of issues and potential solutions of this specific concern.

#### **d. Professional Registration**

PACEY Cymru recommend that the committee looks at work to date in relation to Professional Registration of the Early Years and Childcare Workforce in Wales and further commits to the further potential development of this as a priority with the appropriate scrutiny.

The [Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan \(2017\)](#) outlines the commitment to consult on proposals for this however much of this work has been delayed following the COVID-19 pandemic. PACEY Cymru would like to see a refocus on this area of work.

Professional registration provides recognition of continuous professional development; it provides opportunities for individuals to set out their learning pathway and demonstrate their skills and experience; and would recognise childcare as a profession which requires specialist skills and knowledge to support child development. Registration also provides public assurance. Practitioners who fail to adhere to the code of professional conduct may be subject to fitness to practice procedures, which would ensure they have the skills, knowledge and character to practice safely and effectively. This would bring the sector in line with current practice in other professions such as teaching and with adult social care.

Ongoing and emerging issues in relation to professionalism and recognition for the sector have been a frustration for the childcare and early years sector that were heightened during the pandemic. A commitment of a focus on this would aid parity of approach between our sector and the health and social care and education sectors.



PACEY Cymru, as a member of the Early Years Action Group also supports the submission of the joint response from this group.

#### **Thema 4: Plant a phobl Ifanc | Theme 4: Children and young people**

We recommend that the Committee focuses on:

##### **2. Scrutiny of the impact of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act**

The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 provides the framework for a new system to support children with additional learning needs in Wales which will be phased in from September 2021. This aims to ensure that all learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are supported to overcome barriers to learning and can achieve their full potential. PACEY Cymru believe it is vitally important to scrutinise the impact of this Act not only on children but on those who work with children and young people. This will help to understand fully the implications and any issues that have arisen, either directly or indirectly and look at good practice and solutions. We are already aware of inconsistencies across Wales in relation to implementation that have impacted on registered childcare providers and led to confusion and a lack of parity for the sector. Given the decline in childminders noted above we need to ensure that support is provided to registered providers with any issues or barriers addressed.

##### **3. Scrutiny of the impact of the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020**

This law will come into force in March 2022 and it is important to scrutinise the impact of this law on all who have an interest in it but specifically children, young people and their families.

##### **4. Scrutiny of the development and implementation of the Curriculum for Wales**

With the wider implementation of the new curriculum in September 2022 there is work to be done to ensure that the curriculum for the non-maintained sector is fit for purpose and aligns to the wider ECEC developments (outlined above) and is co-produced with experts from the sector with rigorous testing at each point.

The links between the non-maintained curriculum and the impact on transitions and partnership working need to be carefully considered. We believe there also needs to be a greater focus on Welsh language and culture. This will ensure that the implementation does not have a negative impact on the work that has been



undertaken over recent years to support Welsh language and culture and work related to positive transitions and partnership working.

**5. Ensure that learning from the pandemic (both positive and negative) is used to build back better, with a clear and specific focus on the interests and lived experiences of babies and children in the early years. The committee should scrutinise evidence from COVID, recognising that the pandemic has largely exacerbated existing inequalities, and ensure that recovery plans have a clear focus on tackling inequities that affect child outcomes.**

There was very little reference to babies and young children in the last 'Impact of COVID-19 on children and young people' committee's report. As the first 'lockdown babies' approach their second birthday, we have an opportunity to learn from the pandemic and be bold and tackle structural barriers many children and families face. Children need to be at the heart of recovery and their and their parents lived experiences and voices needs to be heard.

