

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 57

Ymateb gan: Dave Goodgerm, Dave Goodger, Prif Swyddog Gweithredol, Blynyddoedd
Response from: Dave Goodger, Chief Executive Officer, Early Years Wales

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

Not directly applicable to our organisation

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

Not directly applicable to our organisation

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)

Acknowledging that the impacts from the pandemic have exacerbated existing inequalities, we call upon the panel to ensure that the evidence and lived experiences of children and parents/ carers are robustly scrutinised to learn lessons (positive and negative). We would ask that this learning is utilised to ensure that the best opportunities for babies and children in the early years are embedded for future generations.

Evidence¹ about the pandemic and related health outcomes² suggests that existing inequalities, notably linked to Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic populations and

¹ Academy, T. B., 2021. The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19.

² <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-01/chief-medical-officer-for-wales-special-report.pdf>



families living in deprivation were widened. The pandemic affected the health and mental health of some population groups disproportionately. Additionally, long-standing evidence demonstrates that systemic inequality places challenges upon babies and children in early years. These can and often do result in issues or delays in cognitive functioning, health issues and present socialisation challenges that set-up barriers to future well-being and opportunity. We call on the panel to capitalise on the extensive data available and use this to help ensure our future policy developments in Wales are informed by evidence and contribute to breaking down barriers created by inequity. In so doing, the panel can be assured that following the pandemic and the lockdowns to date all policies related to babies and children in the early years promote opportunity for all and contribute to providing a more cohesive and equitable start for all children in Wales.

We ask the Panel to ensure that the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life is recognised in policy and action; making commitments to ensuring that across all policy areas, the impact on a child's first 1000 days (and the related impacts on parents/ carers) are integral to the Rights-based approach and supports the best provision for a positive start in life.

Recent advances in brain development and over 30 years of research in this field demonstrates that the early education and care that is provided to children in the first 1000 days, and a positive home environment is pivotal in establishing children's life chances, and mental health into adulthood. In the UK it is estimated that the cost of late intervention is £17bn³. Across all policy areas in Welsh Government, consideration should be made about how decisions impact on children in the first 1000 days. We would call on the scrutiny panel to be the guardians of children's Rights and opportunities ensuring that policies directly related to children promote a positive start. Beyond this Panel and across Welsh Government, we call on the Panel and Panel members to be the advocates for children ensuring that policies that impact on families and young people indirectly, such as travel, and infrastructure are focused on promoting positive opportunities and experiences for children. We also ask that the Panel recognise the role all experiences (particularly if less than positive) potentially have on children in their formative years. Through recognition of the importance of these 1000 days, we ask the Panel to advocate for early intervention policies and funding to support babies, children, and their families; and recognise that one of the biggest safeguards is professional, regulated childcare universally available and locally accessible for all.

³ <https://royalfoundation.com/early-years/>



We would call on the Panel to hold all stakeholders to account for building upon the effective use of outdoors advocated for during the pandemic and incorporating evidence-based well-being actions into all policy and strategy decisions. actions that were promoted during the pandemic and which should continue into the 'new normal' for all children.

The evidence during the pandemic that health and activity are intertwined has increased. It was noted that the mental health and physical health benefits for young children through outdoor play were a priority⁴, and that removing or limiting play and outdoor experiences has a detrimental effect on children's mental and physical health. Daily physical activity, high-quality play opportunities, cultural experiences, and mental wellbeing activities all have been proven to support children's development and are strong evidence-based interventions to prevent mental health issues developing. Therefore, building these experiences into our normal daily lives would be a positive outcome for future generations following the pandemic. To do this, we call on the scrutiny panel to ensure that policies and strategies normalise and promote play and the use of outdoor spaces. In so doing, the Panel will help contribute to increasing the number of children who get closer to meeting the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations of 180 minutes of daily physical activity⁵.

Scrutiny of the impact of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act and Scrutiny of the impact of the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020

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, which is to be valued and is welcomed.

The abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment (Wales) Act 2020, also welcomed by Early Years Wales closes a legal loophole and further enshrines protections on children from unnecessary physical punishments.

⁴ <https://senedd.wales/media/ixzpwqr5/cr-ld14286-e.pdf>

⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/832868/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines.pdf



We are fully committed to both Acts, however, we would call on the Panel to be the group in the Senedd that oversees these legal changes and ensures that any unintended consequences, such as increases in workloads and pressure on staff in the early years sector are avoided. We are aware that there are inconsistencies in approaches between Local Authorities in training linked to the ALN Act, and these could lead to perceptions that new legal frameworks require certain workshop/training attendances whereas, in fact they do not and following guidance suffices for all staff in the sector.

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

We ask the Panel to demonstrate support for the commitment to a full implementation of the ECEC policy; advocating for ECEC throughout Government; and identifying and overcoming national and local barriers to establish a coherent ECEC pathway for all babies and children.

In 2019 the First Minister committed to ECEC stating the new approach would build on the excellent childcare provision and well-regarded early education offer to ensure that;

‘all children will have a high-quality stimulating learning and care experience in any education and care setting they attend – in Welsh, English or bilingually. The type of setting they attend is irrelevant if they are being supported and nurtured as they need.

Putting child development at the heart of early childhood education and care means we must ensure the principle of quality is clear to all who work with children and underpins provision in every setting in Wales.’⁶

During the pandemic, some work has continued to develop a Quality Framework and a platform to develop ECEC in Wales and attempt a pilot, however, there are still challenges in local and national policy and tensions between the education and care aspects of the framework where these interface for young children.

We call on the scrutiny panel to explore progress to date, establish a timeline for full implementation of an ECEC approach that is cohesive and consistent across Wales, and ensure that where this approach sits across Ministerial portfolios there is a clear understanding about the role of each Ministerial brief in facilitating the successful implementation of the ECEC approach. Alternatively, we call on the Senedd to

⁶ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-launch-early-childhood-education-and-care-ecec-approach>



identify a strategic driver in terms of Ministerial responsibility for ECEC; an approach that crosses social care, health, and early education portfolios.

This ECEC approach aspires to and can provide all children in Wales with a coherent pathway from baby, through their early years and into formal education. It also acknowledges the role care providers play in educating and socialising children in their formative years; and the role early education providers (and education in general) play in contributing to social childcare allowing parents to pursue career and learning opportunities. Both sectors and contributions are equally valued by the parents of children in their formative years; and the approach would be welcomed from an early years perspective. Early Years Wales fears that the structural processes, barriers and wide variety of stakeholders and stakeholder priorities might see ECEC drift.

That the panel ensures the commitments made in the Childcare, Play and Early Years workforce plan (2017) are continued beyond the pandemic.

We would want to seek assurances that commitments to recognising the professional status of staff are delivered; making the professions attractive to work in and rewarding staff appropriately in terms of pay and conditions. Our experience during the pandemic is that staff working in the childcare sector have felt undervalued and poorly rewarded for their hard work. Recent figures from England indicate that pay in the early years sector is still an ongoing challenge⁷. Additionally, our own recruitment pages demonstrate that the staff in the early years are paid at the lower end of the pay scales, many earning minimum wage or salaries just above this; and that settings are finding it difficult to recruit sufficiently qualified staff to fulfil vacant jobs. By committing to recognising the childcare workforce as professionally qualified and competent; treating the staff as professionals and not the low-paid unskilled workers they perceive to be. This could make the career and pathway for lifelong work in the sector can be more attractive and prevent a transient culture where the workforce is short term, attracting staff whose employment is based around family commitments rather than a career choice. It is important to note there are many in the workforce who have proven to be committed and have stayed in the profession for numerous years, or whole careers. These committed and valued staff often comment about the lack of recognition in comparison to educators but are retained in the profession due to their passion and commitment for working with children⁸. Addressing these issues through monitoring

⁷ <https://www.cache.org.uk/news-media/the-real-impact-of-underfunding-in-early-years>

⁸ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022185618800351>



closely pay, working conditions and the workforce plan's delivery would enhance the workforces' perception of being valued.

That, in alignment with the First Minister's words on ECEC (see above) and in support of parental choice, we call on the Panel 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 opportunities 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.

In examining the data, trends in re-opening and remaining closed and equity of provision the Panel are ensuring that for all families there is local, affordable childcare, promoting high-quality opportunities for children. We would ask the Panel to ensure that there is sufficient opportunities including wrap-around school care to meet the needs of children and families. We additionally ask that the benefits of regulated childcare are recognised and advocated for at all levels to support early years childcare and to provide continuity for children from 3-12 years old too.



Finally, although we recognise the impact of Flying Start, we call on the panel to explore the mechanism for accessing this provision. As this is largely demarcated through residential postcodes there is evidence that some families in need of these services miss out, whereas some families in receipt of these services do not require all the additional benefits in terms of childcare provision. Currently, there are increasing pressures on social care services with child poverty rates in Wales above 30%. Maximising the impact of the provision, and recognising the challenges faced by families with in-work poverty is important, alongside postcode of residence.

