

CYPE SP 59

Ymateb gan: **Helen Wales**

Response from: **Helen Wales, A Fairer Start Mission Manager, Wales, Nesta**

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

The sixth Senedd will be a period of major change for all those involved in education, from the earliest years onwards. The full introduction of the Curriculum for Wales and ongoing responses to the pandemic mean that this will be a period of challenges and opportunities and will require innovative solutions. These changes will be set against a backdrop of increasing child poverty, growing social inequality, and the existing disadvantage gap.

We therefore suggest that the Committee focuses on two key areas:

- Ensuring continued and focused attention on addressing the disadvantage gap for children and young people
- Enabling innovative responses to address current challenges and create impactful change

These priorities are relevant across the age range, from the perinatal period onwards (see Theme 4).

1. Are education and curriculum reforms contributing to narrowing the outcome gap for children growing up in disadvantage, at all stages?

If they are not, how can we act quickly to change this?



The current Programme for Government commits to ‘continu[ing] our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise’. However, we know that progress in this area is difficult and that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities.

Questions to consider:

- Are we learning from past experience of reform in Wales and reform elsewhere? E.g. Early experiences with the Foundation Phase and Scotland’s efforts to close the persistent attainment gap.
- Are we deliberately designing new structures and systems with the *intention* of closing the outcomes gap, and ensuring that changes and developments do not create unintended consequences for children who already face disadvantage (see section below on technology in education)?
- Are we making sure we address existing biases in the education system which may reinforce disadvantage e.g. wider issues linked to the cost of the school day, discrimination based on race and ethnicity?
- Are we using a range of measures that help us understand progress against the wider set of outcomes that support educational progress e.g. wellbeing and self-confidence?¹ Is this information available to all contributing stakeholders?

2. Are we creating the conditions for innovative responses within the education reform process, and other services that support children and young people’s development?

We need to ensure that we are creating the conditions for the full range of education practitioners to be innovative in their work, and to sustain the creativity and responsiveness demonstrated through the pandemic.

The Committee has a key role to play in ensuring that the education system in Wales, and the wider system of services that support young people, nurture the conditions for innovation. This could usefully include:

- Supporting the process of identifying innovation challenges
- Scrutinising the conditions for innovation e.g. available time, access to expertise, access to financial resources, collaboration - including between sectors, ensuring that the system supports ‘constructive failure’ and learning,

¹ This follows recommendations made by Audit Scotland in response to the persistent attainment gap <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/news/attainment-gap-remains-wide-and-better-education-data-needed>



enabling useful evaluation and dissemination of learning, developing and testing new initiatives

- Seeking ways to formalise innovation as a value within the system e.g. incorporating willingness to innovate in inspection criteria, through funding streams
- Prioritising high quality data and evidence to support decision-making

Innovation requires information. The Committee could usefully scrutinise the data and information needs of different stakeholders in the education system (from parents to practitioners to third party agencies), as well as access to existing data (including any data collected at national, regional and local levels but not published, and by private providers e.g. EdTech platforms), to enable collaboration and innovation that puts the holistic development of children and young people at its heart. This will be particularly important alongside new assessment arrangements.

Note: This section is also relevant in section 4 in relation to the early years.

3. How can we ensure technology improves outcomes for disadvantaged pupils, and avoids the risk of perpetuating existing inequalities?

Technology presents opportunities for addressing existing educational disadvantages - not just in supporting learning, but in engaging families and supporting the collection and understanding of management and outcomes data. However, it is not inevitable that technology will impact educational disadvantages positively. Children's experiences of technology during the pandemic have varied considerably - most visibly through inequalities in access to hardware or connectivity to use EdTech tools.

Whilst research in this area is limited, Nesta/SchoolDash research in England during the first school closures in Spring 2020 showed usage of some maths platforms increasing by between 2 and 7 times.² However, this analysis of EdTech platform data also shows that even as access to devices became more equal, gaps in engagement between pupils from schools with more children eligible for FSM persisted. This was indicated by lower numbers of student and parent logins per teacher login in schools with higher levels of deprivation.³ This demonstrates that we need to focus on the needs of disadvantaged children to ensure that digital innovations benefit all children. This should consider how the specific needs of some children inform good product design, the need for sensitive monitoring and evaluation, the need to

² <https://www.nesta.org.uk/data-visualisation-and-interactive/levelling-maths-during-lockdown/>

³ This analysis focused on schools in England: <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project-updates/edtech-usage-story-four-graphs/>



address technological innovations as part of the bigger picture of engagement, and guidance for teachers on how implementation and usage can be tailored to the needs of disadvantaged children.

We should also consider which areas of technology in education are the ones with most potential to close the disadvantage gap. Again, evidence is limited but two areas which show promise are online tuition and parental engagement in learning. The March 2021 [Beyond Covid, Learning in the Next Phase](#) report,⁴ for example, highlights the opportunities for greater collaboration between learners and parents/carers presented by online teaching tools, and improved communication with school.

Nesta's recent work on data poverty in Wales and Scotland has identified that without specific action on data poverty at a Government level, the most vulnerable groups in society may be excluded from accessing public services, including education. We define data poverty as: *'those individuals, households or communities who cannot afford sufficient, private and secure mobile or broadband data to meet their essential needs'*.⁵ The Committee could usefully explore the impact of the Digital Strategy for Wales with a specific view to identifying actions to rapidly address where technology in education could be exacerbating existing inequalities linked to data poverty.

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)

Good physical and mental health are both key outcomes for children and young people and prerequisites for enabling children and young people to reach their full potential. We welcome the focus on mental health proposed for the sixth senedd, and the focus on health and wellbeing in the new curriculum.

The causes of ill-health are structural and societal and cannot be addressed at a purely individual level. This is particularly the case with obesity, where poor food environments (i.e. the availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy foods) are

⁴ <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/ca47759a-2273-42fa-bc7e-50cc93c350d2/beyond-covid-learning-in-the-next-phase-analysis-of-conversations.pdf>

⁵ https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/What_is_Data_Poverty.pdf



rarely in the control of children and young people and have a greater impact on food choices than individual motivation.⁶ The latest analysis from the WIMD makes the links between obesity, income deprivation and lower attainment in the Foundation Phase Indicator clear.⁷

While in general policies that aim at tackling obesity are well-supported by the public, interventions that focus on educating and supporting individual action are typically seen to be more acceptable than more impactful interventions that focus on improving food environments (e.g. by changing, disincentivizing or restricting food choices). This can be explained as stemming from the widely held, but false, belief that obesity is largely due to a lack of willpower by individuals; a viewpoint that also reinforces stigma.⁸ This creates a potential barrier to the implementation of impactful policy and therefore changing of this narrative needs to be a high priority.

The focus of the Healthy Weight Health Wales Delivery Plan⁹ on food environments rather than individual action is welcome. The high rates of obesity among children in Wales indicates that there needs to be even more of an emphasis on schools and early years settings both as food environments and potential agents of change (in attitudes as well as behaviour).

Our understanding of the negative impacts of loneliness on poor health outcomes is also increasing,¹⁰ and we know that young people aged 16-24 in Wales are mostly likely to describe themselves as lonely.¹¹ Scrutiny of measures to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people should include the impact of social isolation, as well as opportunities for social and cultural connection.

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

The fundamental role that the **early years** play in shaping future life chances and the disproportionate negative impact that disadvantage (especially but not only

⁶ <https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy%20-%20Files/Understanding%20Obesity%20Draft%20Report.pdf>

⁷ <https://gov.wales/welsh-index-multiple-deprivation-2019-deprivation-analysis-relating-young-children.html>

⁸ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/changing-minds-about-changing-behaviours-obesity-focus/>

⁹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-02/healthy-weight-delivery-plan-2020-22.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25910392/>

¹¹ <https://gov.wales/loneliness-national-survey-wales-april-2019-march-2020.html>



socioeconomic disadvantage) can have on the youngest children is well-known. The early years have been a priority in Wales for some time, but the challenges persist.

In this context, we have identified a number of areas in the early years relevant to:

- Ensuring continued and focused attention on addressing the disadvantage gap
- Enabling innovative responses to challenges

Data and evidence: Data relating to early years outcomes in Wales remains largely based on key health milestones, with the Foundation Phase Indicator at 7 being the first national measure of developmental progress, even though we know that differences in developmental outcomes can be evident at a much earlier stage.¹² The Committee could usefully scrutinise the data and information needs of different stakeholders in the early years to support effective intervention and improve developmental outcomes for children, including the impact of routine assessments in terms of identifying which children need support. This should include national and local measures, as well as accessibility of information, and data and information sharing across services.

This should also include responding to the changing picture of poverty and disadvantage in Wales and the potential limitations of area-based models with rising child poverty levels, and assessing the value of alternative tools for identifying need (e.g. Adverse Childhood Experience-based approaches and our understanding of school-readiness factors¹³).

Early Childhood Education and Care: 'Early education' that supports positive child development begins at birth and should recognise the vital role of parents. Quality provision has the potential to impact on child development outcomes, as well as parental wellbeing, capacity and capability.

We also know that access to high quality ECEC is particularly beneficial for children growing up in disadvantage,¹⁴ but that access to provision and funding arrangement can risk creating barriers for these children.

¹² See <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/ready-to-read-wales.pdf> for an example of use of the Millennium Cohort Study to identify early gaps in language skills.

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https://www.adruk.org/fileadmin/uploads/adruk/Documents/Data_Insight_Risk_factors_for_not_being_ready_to_start_school_February_2021_.pdf

¹⁴ <https://senedd.wales/media/yseggg0a/early-childhood-education-web-english.pdf> p.3



The Committee could usefully scrutinise the impact of current ECEC arrangements from the perspective of tackling the impacts of disadvantage, especially on children's developmental outcomes for those more at risk of falling behind. E.g. What proportion of children at risk of not meeting the Foundation Phase Indicator access 30 hours of childcare and/ or the Flying Start offer? How is the system proactively identifying children at risk of poorer outcomes and monitoring who is/ isn't participating in universal and targeted services? Given the detrimental impact that poverty can play if experienced in the first three years of life, are resources sufficiently targeted to children aged 0-3, including parenting support and perinatal mental health support?¹⁵

Structural challenges relating to affordability, accessibility and flexibility in the childcare context are longstanding and require fresh thinking, especially after the challenges of the pandemic. The Committees could usefully set the challenge of finding innovative solutions to these issues.¹⁶

Other topics that the Committee could usefully explore to generate impact in this area include:

- Assessing the impact of 'early education' from the age of 1 (see recent commitments from the Scottish Government)
- Coherence of provision across sectors in different parts of Wales and accessibility for different families, including financial barriers
- The role of peer-based and 'parent-powered' initiatives in creating positive outcomes for young children and investment in this area¹⁷
- Relative investment at different ages and stages based on potential for developmental impact
- Communication strategies linked to the early years and their success in engaging groups most at risk of not achieving outcomes, including using behavioural insights to tailor communication

¹⁵ <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Changing-patterns-of-poverty-in-early-childhood-Nuffield-Foundation.pdf> p.4. Research shows that poverty is correlated with poorer outcomes, but children living in poverty, whose parents have good parenting skills can still have good outcomes: 'a study by Kiernan and Mensah (2011) found that 58% of children who experienced persistent poverty and strong parenting skills had good child outcomes at age five.' (p6)

¹⁶ Nesta undertook some work in 2016 to identify innovation opportunities in this area. Whilst the work focuses on the context in England and is now five years old, the study demonstrates the value of this approach: <https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/innovation-in-childcare-14-07.pdf>

¹⁷ See <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/parents-helping-parents-it-takes-village-raise-child/> for examples supported by Nesta.



- A rapid review of the potential of pandemic innovations to sustain support for the home learning environment
- Assessing the potential role of social prescribing to support perinatal mental health and child development as part of wider applications of this approach

