

## **Written Response by the Welsh Government to the report of the Children and Young People Committee entitled Inquiry into Implementation of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009**

**June 2012**

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Through 14-19 Learning Pathways the Welsh Government has sought to transform education provision for learners in Wales; raise educational attainment; and ensure that all young people are able to achieve their true potential.

To ensure that learners in Wales had access to wider choice and support to overcome any barriers to their learning to achieving their potential, the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 was introduced. As one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the National Assembly for Wales, the Measure marked a milestone in our commitment to develop an education system for Wales that met the needs of young people of Wales.

It is my view that it is still too early to evaluate the full impact of the Measure and whether all of its objectives are being met. However, I am pleased that the evidence provided to the inquiry has indicated that good progress has already been made. The first cohort of learners to have undertaken their 14-19 education, under the statutory provisions of the Measure, will not complete their studies until the summer of 2013. Only then will we be able to begin to assess the impact the Measure has made on educational attainment and whether wider choice and the support offered has helped learners to successfully progress into higher education or employment.

I believe that good progress has already been made. Through the significant 14-19 grant funding from the Welsh Government, to support capacity building, wider choice has been secured for all learners across Wales. The ring fencing of grant funding to support the expansion of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision at Level 2 and 3, particularly vocational provision, has ensured that all schools and further education colleges have been able to meet the local curriculum requirements of the Measure. I am also pleased that the Key Stage 4 local curriculum offers have been genuine offers in terms of learner take-up.

The Welsh Government has made a financial commitment to continue supporting the implementation of the Measure through to 2013-14. I have already notified Regional Networks of the indicative grant funding for this period. I have also asked my officials to review the support required going forward and their considerations will be informed by the outcome of the Qualifications Review and the review of the National Planning and Funding System.

I very much welcome the publication of the Committee's report and their recommendations. There is a great deal of information for my officials and I to

consider; including why there has been such conflicting evidence as to how well the Measure has been implemented and is working.

I am pleased to be able to accept, or accept in principle the majority of the recommendations made by the committee. I have not accepted recommendation 7, all schools provide their learners with a Learning Pathway document which meets the requirements of the Learning and Skills Wales Measure. However, I appreciate the Committee's intent in making the recommendation and I will be asking my officials to continue to monitor the situation to ensure that compliance continues.

In response to recommendation 2, I acknowledge the importance of ensuring that students and parents are provided with comprehensive information about available courses and training opportunities and will give further consideration as to the most appropriate way of ensuring this happens. I am aware that in some areas local authorities have taken a lead in providing post-16 local area prospectuses.

A number of the recommendations call for a review or evaluation of particular areas of 14-19 provision. My officials have already been in discussion with Estyn about undertaking a thematic inspection of the Learning Coach function in 2013-14 and about the possibility of undertaking a review of vulnerable learners and those with additional learning needs in schools and further education institutions as part of their future programme of inspections.

I will continue to review the effectiveness of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure in supporting our learners to achieve their true potential and to develop the skills necessary for their progression into higher education, training or employment. This report, and the evidence collected by the Committee during their inquiry, will provide crucial information to assist us in that process, including continuing to challenge the education sector to do better and improve the opportunities and prospects for our young people.

I remain committed to ensuring that young people in Wales have access to a broad and balanced local curriculum, which is aligned to their needs, interests and aspirations; but which also helps them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be able to progress into high skilled employment or higher education. This is vital not only in the interests of the individual but to ensuring that Wales is a country with a workforce equipped to compete in a global economy.

I have set out below my response to the Report's individual recommendations.

## **Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:**

### **Recommendation 1**

The Committee recommends that:

The Minister for Education and Skills should review the decision to set 30 courses (including five vocational courses) as the minimum number of courses of study necessary to form a local curriculum at Key Stage 4.

As part of his review, the Minister should evaluate any unintended consequences of the wider choice of courses; the balance between academic and vocational courses and the impact on smaller and rural schools.

#### **Response : Accept**

I accept this recommendation. The 14-19 Learning Pathways policy ensures that young people are provided with a wide range of courses to allow them to follow courses which both interests and motivates them and to ensure they remain engaged in education.

Although we have still not seen the full impact of the Learning Pathways policy I am keen that all Welsh Government policies are reviewed regularly to ensure that they are benefitting learners. I am therefore accepting a review of the local curriculum at Key Stage 4 in relation to the minimum number of courses offered.

I remain fully committed to ensuring that young people are offered a local curriculum which provides access to a wide range of courses that allows them to follow courses which meets both their individual needs and interests.

**Financial Implications** – None. Any additional costs associated with the consultation exercise will be met from existing programme budgets.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should issue guidance requiring all schools and colleges to produce a joint prospectus containing impartial advice on all the local courses and training opportunities for 14-19 year old learners (including schools, colleges and work-based learning places) to enable learners to have access to all information available to assist with their choices at age 14 and 16.

#### **Response : Accept in Principle**

I acknowledge the importance of ensuring that students and parents are provided with comprehensive information about all local available courses and

training opportunities and will give further consideration as to the most appropriate way of ensuring this happens.

I will review the current legislation governing the provision of information by further education institutions and schools concerning the courses they offer and have also asked my officials to consider options for publishing the Local Curriculum Offers at Key Stage 4 and post-16 on the Welsh Government website.

I am not so convinced that it is desirable to publish a joint prospectus for Key Stage 4. I have, however, asked my officials to consider options for publishing the Local Curriculum Offers at Key Stage 4 and post-16 on the Welsh Government website. At Key Stage 4 it will ensure that learners and their parents/guardians will be aware of and be able to compare the local curriculum offered by their school with other schools across Wales.

In the longer term I have asked my officials to discuss with Careers Wales Online the feasibility and value-for-money of developing a function to support the publication of an electronic common area prospectus for 16-19 year old learners across Wales. This would allow schools, colleges and training providers to publish a combined prospectus and for learners to search for course opportunities in a specified area.

Therefore I have no plans to issues any further guidance at the moment.

**Financial Implications** – The development of a joint post-16 prospectus function with Careers Wales Online would require a further investment and I have asked my officials to scope out the feasibility and costs of this development with Careers Wales Online.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should review the extent and impact of increased travel and transport, which has arisen as a result of the implementation of the Measure. The Review should specifically research and evaluate:

- the impact of increased travel on 14-19 year old learners, specifically the number of learners that are travelling to other sites regularly and the average and maximum length of journeys;
- the impact of travel and transport on younger learners (14-16 year olds);
- the extent to which local authorities are trying to minimise the levels of learner travel;
- the cost of travel and transport to local authorities, schools, and individual learners, particularly in rural areas;

- the financial impact on Consortia, as the 14-19 grants are phased out and the effect on transport plans.
- the time spent by learners and teachers/lecturers on travel and transport and the impact of increased travel on other lessons and playtime/lunch breaks;
- the number of learners who are reluctant to travel and who, as a result, have a reduced choice of courses;
- the effectiveness of digital learning as a means to reduce the need for travel.

### **Response : Accept**

I accept this recommendation. However, as school transport provision is a matter for the Minister for Local Government and Communities (LG&C), any review of the impact of increased travel and transport, resulting from the Measure, will need to be jointly commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Local Government and Communities. I believe that there are two key elements to this review, firstly, the impact on learners at Key Stage 4 and 16-18, and secondly the logistical and operational impact on local authorities and transport providers of having to put in place the necessary arrangements for the transport of learners to access their wider choice.

The Minister for Local Government and Communities and I have, therefore, asked that our officials look into how the review can be taken forward, jointly. I propose that the review should be undertaken during 2012-13, reporting back by the end of March 2013. The findings will then be considered alongside the findings of the review into the Key Stage 4 local curriculum requirements, which the Committee has also recommended, and I have accepted. The review will also need to consider the opportunities for greater collaboration between local authorities and other partners.

**Financial Implications** – To take forward a review that encompasses both the educational and transportation aspects of the recommendations outlined in the report will require commissioning a research consultant. The costs of doing so will be in the region of £20-30k – this can be covered by existing programme funding.

### **Recommendation 4**

The Committee recommends that:

The Minister for Education and Skills, in conjunction with the Minister for Business, Enterprise and Technology, and the Welsh Local Government Association should ensure that schools are included as priority public sector

institutions to benefit from the roll out of the next-generation broadband Wales project.

**Response : Accept in principle**

I support the principle that all schools in Wales have access to next generation connectivity services.

While the Next Generation Broadband Wales Project will ensure equality of infrastructure across the whole of Wales, delivery of broadband connectivity to public sectors sites, including schools, is being achieved through the rollout of the Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) Network.

The majority of Welsh schools will be connected to the PSBA network by the end of this year based on requirements provided to PSBA by Unitary Authorities, who are responsible for the procurement and management of schools connectivity.

PSBA is structured to adapt quickly to changes in the marketplace and will take advantage of the Next Generation Broadband Wales Project rollout to provide appropriate bandwidth at best value.

**Financial Implications**

None, budget for school connectivity is devolved to Unitary Authorities.

**Recommendation 5**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government, with other key partners, should promote positive action to tackle gender stereotypes in education, employment and training at every opportunity.

**Response : Accept**

I accept this recommendation. The Welsh Government is fully committed to promoting positive action to tackle gender stereotyping in education, employment and training and will continue to seek out opportunities to do so.

The Welsh Government is already supporting specific projects which aim to tackle gender stereotyping. For example the 'Get on with Science' project, being led by ContinYou Cymru and Chwarae Teg, aims to encourage wider engagement in STEM, particularly for girls, and promotion of an increase in the number of girls pursuing careers in science.

There is also a requirement in the Welsh Government's Careers and World of Work framework for all learning providers, for the 11-19 year-old cohort, to examine the implications of stereotyping in employment and training, recognising the benefits of a positive attitude to difference and diversity. The provision of impartial careers advice and guidance, by qualified careers

advisors, continues to help challenge stereotypical gender assumptions about career paths.

**Financial Implications** – None.

### **Recommendation 6**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should urgently commission a review of learner support services and pastoral care, including an evaluation of the consistency of provision of learning coaches and clarification of the roles of those providing learning support services.

### **Response : Accept**

I accept this recommendation. My officials are in discussions with Estyn about undertaking a thematic review of learning coaching as part of Estyn's 2013-14 programme of inspection.

The provision of information, advice, guidance and support is an area of shared concern and I have seen conflicting evidence as to the quality and extent of the support being provided to 14-19 learners across Wales. I am prepared to act where there is evidence of schools and colleges failing to meet their responsibilities under the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure and in particular in failing to provide information, advice and guidance in an impartial manner in the best interests of the learner.

With regard to clarification of the roles, this is provided within the 'Learner Support Services and Learning Pathways Document guidance', which was issued by the Welsh Government in February 2011 (Guidance document No: 047/2011). However, should the Estyn thematic inspection identify any need for additional guidance, I will give consideration to strengthening the existing guidance. It is very important that those delivering learner support services recognise the respective functions between learning coaching, personal support and careers advice and guidance and where and when to signpost learners to other services.

Pastoral care is also an important element of a young person's education and I will review what further guidance maybe needed to support its delivery based on Estyn reports on its delivery across Wales.

I have recently established a new division with my department, which is focusing on young people's engagement and employment. Their focus will be on developing clear processes and brokerage systems for signposting young people to the right support service at the right time. I expect to see more coherent arrangements put in place to provide increased levels of personal support to those young people with additional or complex needs. Guidance on youth support services, to be published later this year, will clarify the Welsh Government's expectations.

**Financial Implications** – None. There are no additional costs associated with an Estyn thematic inspection of learner support services. There may be future implications arising from the findings and recommendations of such a review but these will be met from existing programme budgets. Any additional guidance issued as a result of the review will be published electronically so there will be no additional publication costs

### **Recommendation 7**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should evaluate and, if necessary, accelerate the implementation and use of Learning Pathway Plans to ensure their consistent use and application across all maintained schools.

### **Response : Reject**

I reject this recommendation. All schools and colleges in Wales have indicated in their returns to the Welsh Government that they have provided all of their 14-19 learners with a Learning Pathway Document which meets the minimum requirements of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure; namely that learners are provided with a document which details the courses of study that they are entitled to follow and any learner support to be provided to them.

It was never the intention of the Welsh Government to duplicate what was already in place, but to ensure that every learner had their own record documenting the courses they will follow and the learner support they can expect to receive. Schools and colleges have therefore incorporated the requirements of the Measure into their existing learner records.

The Welsh Government has supported the development of an extended online Learning Pathway Document on Careers Wales Online for those schools, colleges and learners who wish to use it. Learners can use this document to record their formal, non-formal and informal learning within school, college or their wider community. They can also use it to record their career goals and aspirations and to identify any gaps in their experiences of skills and how they intend to meet these. The Welsh Government has promoted the availability of this online version to schools and colleges and its availability is highlighted in the Welsh Government's Learning Pathway Document guidance (047/2011). The latest information that I have from Careers Wales Online indicates that there are currently over 32,000 14-19 year old learner's using the online document. This means that approximately 25% of learners in Wales are using the online electronic version.

**Financial implications** – None. The electronic Learning Pathways Document has been fully developed and there are no further developments planned for the foreseeable future.

## **Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should evaluate the impact of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 on vulnerable learners, including learners in mainstream schools with additional learning needs and vulnerable learners in further education colleges.

### **Response : Accept**

I accept this recommendation but again I believe that it would be better to defer any evaluation until 2014-15, when the first cohort of learners, who will have completed their learning pathways under the auspices of the Measure, will have completed their 14-19 education stage. This will give us a truer picture of the impact of the Measure on vulnerable learners in both mainstream schools and further education institutions. I have asked that my officials discuss the possibility of Estyn undertaking a thematic review as part of their 2014-15 inspection cycle.

**Financial Implications** – None. There are no additional costs associated with an Estyn thematic inspection of vulnerable learners, including learners in mainstream schools with additional learning needs and vulnerable learners in further education colleges. However, there may be future implications arising from the findings and recommendations of such a review but these will be met from existing programme budgets.

## **Recommendation 9**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should identify a list of key actions that it can put in place quickly to promote more consistent and effective employer engagement in the planning and delivery of 14-19 provision. The Welsh Government should also draw up a list of key actions that will ensure that accurate and up-to-date labour market intelligence is more readily available to the 14-19 Networks.

### **Response: Accept in principle**

I accept in principle this recommendation. I have accepted this in principle only because I believe that I have already put in place a range of actions which will ensure that there is more effective employer engagement in the planning and delivery of 14-19 provision.

The Welsh Government's 14-19 Learning Pathways guidance already sets out its expectation that the 14-19 networks should include representation from either employers or work based training providers. Other vehicles for employer engagement include the Wales Employment and Skills Board, Real Conversation events, which bring together young people and employers, and the 14-19 Qualifications Review.

Qualifications are a key element of 14 to 19 provision and as part of the Review of 14 to 19 Qualifications, the Welsh Government is engaging extensively with employers, as well as other key stakeholders.

Employers are represented on the Review's Project Board and the Deputy Minister for Skills has expressed, on many occasions, the importance of having a qualifications system that prepares our young people for employment as well as for further and / or higher education.

The Review's consultation invites views on how and to what extent employers should be involved in the development or quality assurance of qualifications. It also invites views on how the evidence base on destinations following achievement of qualifications can be improved for the benefit of learners, providers and policy makers. It also asks how advice and guidance to learners making decisions about qualifications might be improved or made more accessible.

The Welsh Government Labour Market Intelligence (LMI) project, which I set up last year, is committed to improving the Labour Market Intelligence base available to individuals, employers, providers, policy makers and others in Wales. The project is supporting the delivery of LMI with respect to 14-19 provision by:

- Improving the communication and perceived relevance of LMI from robust data sources to individuals making learning choices;
- Establishing a clear baseline understanding and analysis of how LMI is being used across the wider careers services in Wales; and
- Ensuring broader communication with key audiences to increase awareness and understanding of the labour market in Wales, making messages understandable and engaging.

My aim is for the LMI project to ensure that policy makers become fully aware of the data when they are planning their Local Curricula so that we can ensure young people follow courses which will lead to future employment. .

**Financial Implications** – None. Work within the LMI Project and the costs of the Review of 14 to 19 Qualifications will be met by existing programme budgets.

### **Recommendation 10**

The Committee recommends that:

The Welsh Government should review the impact of the implementation of the Measure on Welsh medium and bilingual education, including dual stream schools.

**Response: Accept**

I accept this recommendation. An evaluation of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy is already being commissioned. This evaluation, which will commence later this year, will include a specific strand to review the impact of the Measure on Welsh-medium, bilingual and dual stream schools and will take into account the 14-19 Learning Pathways Welsh-medium/Bilingual ring-fenced vocational grant funding allocated to networks to provide the necessary support in increasing course options.

**Financial Implications** – None. There are no additional costs associated with this recommendation as a budget has already been allocated for the evaluation of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy. There may, however, be future implications arising from the findings and recommendations of such a review but these will be met from existing programme budgets.