

**Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc
ac Addysg**

**Children, Young People
and Education Committee**

Lynne Neagle MS
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Vikki Howells MS
Minister for Further and Higher Education

17 October 2023

Welsh Government Draft Budget 2025-26

Dear Lynne and Vikki,

As last year, we would like written information to support our scrutiny of the Welsh Government's Draft Budget 2025-26. The annex to this letter sets out in detail the information that we would like to receive.

I would be grateful to receive the written information no later than 13 December 2024. I note that the Welsh Government intends to publish the Draft Budget on 10 December 2024. Please contact my clerks if you are concerned about meeting our proposed deadline in light of the budget timetable.

Given the shared interest across committees in some of the areas listed in the annex to this letter, I have copied in the chairs of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee and the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS
Chair

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

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Annex A: Request to the Cabinet Secretary for Education, and Minister for Further and Higher Education regarding the CYPE Committee's Draft Budget scrutiny 2025-26

Cross-cutting areas

Transparency of budget presentation

As in previous years, we request a clear, transparent explanation of changes to the overall Education and MEG in 2025-26, from 2024-25, including both a comparison with the actual budget in addition to any revised baseline which is used. We would also appreciate a summary of the key changes between 2024-25 and 2025-26.

If a revised baseline is used, we request a breakdown of amounts which have been removed from or added to the 2024-25 budget and an explanation in each case of why it is deemed appropriate to use the revised baseline rather than the actual budget set in 2024-25 for comparisons.

For significant changes to budget lines, we request an explanation of whether money is being taken from/returned to central reserves or allocated from/to other budget lines either within or outside the MEG.

Commentary on Actions and detail of Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) allocations

We request commentary on each of the Actions within the 2025-26 Education MEG, including an analysis and explanation of significant changes since the 2024-25 First Supplementary Budget (October 2024). In the past, this has been provided in an annex – last year it was Annex B.

We also request a breakdown of the 2025-26 Education MEG by Action, and Budget Expenditure Line (BEL), with Final Budget 2024-25 allocations, First Supplementary Budget 2024-25 allocations, forecast 2024-25 outturns, and 2023-24 final outturns all included. If indicative budgets are being set beyond 2025-26, we request details of those as well.

If the Welsh Government uses a revised baseline budget for comparative purposes, we request that the actual 2024-25 First Supplementary Budget allocations are also presented alongside 2025-26 draft budget allocations as well as an explanation of the reasons for the re-calculation of the baseline (as mentioned earlier).

Education priorities and other strategic priorities

Information on how the Education MEG aligns with, and is prioritised according to, the Welsh Government's relevant priorities and key objectives, including:

- An updated assessment from the Cabinet Secretary on the extent to which she believes the Education MEG contains the resources necessary to deliver Welsh Government priorities and key objectives,
- Information on any ongoing negotiations with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language to maximise the level of resources available for education, including funding for schools' core budgets through the Local Government Settlement.
- Details of how allocations to and within the Education MEG align with the Programme for Government.
- Whether, and if so how, the Cabinet Secretary intends to target resources at addressing any cross-cutting themes or priorities across the MEG as a whole, for example the First Minister's vow to "boost standards in schools and colleges", and the Cabinet Secretary's own priorities set out in Plenary on 14 May 2024.

Children's rights and other cross-cutting considerations

In line with assessing whether 'due regard' has been given to article 4 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Welsh Government's duties under the Rights of the Child and Young Persons (Wales) Measure, we request:

- The overall Children's Rights Impact Assessment for this draft Education MEG for 2025-26, which sets out how children's rights are put into effect in these budget allocations, with reference to specific articles in the UNCRC as relevant.
- If a specific CRIA has not been undertaken, the reasons for this.
- A copy of any alternative integrated impact assessment as well as assurances that this assessment demonstrates that the duty of "due regard" to the UNCRC has been exercised.
- Details and/or examples of any changes made to initial allocations within the Education MEG following considerations of children's rights, equalities, sustainability, the Welsh language, or the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as a result of impact assessments, or where these assessments have had a direct influence on the setting of budgets.

Costs of legislation

- Details of allocations within the 2025-26 budget intended for the implementation of or the implementation of primary legislation passed in the past two Senedd terms, including the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018.

- Information on the financial impact of any relevant UK Parliament legislation.
- Financial implications in 2025-26 of any relevant subordinate legislation.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

- Information on any remaining provision in the Education MEG in 2024-25 and 2025-26 for dealing with and recovering from the impact of the pandemic, for example whether the “Recruit, Recover, Raise Standards (RRRS)” programme is continuing in 2025-26.

Impact of cost of living pressures on delivery of education services

- An update on the implications of cost of living pressures and energy prices on the operational delivery of education institutions – across early years, schools, colleges, universities and training providers.

Budget monitoring and the current financial context

- Information on the processes in place for monitoring budgets within the Education MEG throughout the year, identifying potential deficits and surpluses, and taking remedial action or allocating additional funds to cover any shortfalls, particularly in light of the pandemic.
- Details of any changes to the 2024-25 Education MEG that are already anticipated in the Second Supplementary Budget.
- The implications for the Education MEG of the UK Government’s Budget of 30 October 2024.

Specific areas

Funding for school budgets

- An explanation of how the Welsh Government has prioritised funding for schools in the 2025-26 Draft Budget (in both the Housing and Local Government MEG and the Education MEG) and taken account of the Sibieta review of school spending in its approach to setting this budget.
- An update on the review of local authority mainstream school funding, which the Welsh Government is carrying out, and potential amendments to the School Funding (Wales) Regulations 2010.
- The Minister’s perspective on the level of school budget reserves, in the context of the 31 March 2024 data due to be published in late October 2024.

- An explanation of how the Draft Budget 2025-26 supports school improvement and raising standards of education.
- Details of the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) in 2025-26, including a breakdown of its four strands.
- Details of how much LAEG was paid to each local authority in 2024-25, including a breakdown by the four strands.
- Any assessment undertaken on whether the amalgamation of the individual grants into the LAEG in 2024-25 has resulted in any dilution of previously ring-fenced activities and interventions.
- Information on budget allocations to support efforts to improve standards of literacy and numeracy and any assessment that has been made of their efficacy and value for money.

The cost of living and reducing the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes

- Information on how resources within the Education MEG are being used to meet the Welsh Government's long-term commitment to reduce the impact of deprivation on educational outcomes – including from the "Tackling barriers to attainment" BEL or from the LAEG.
- Information on budget provision for the School Essentials Grant and expenditure in 2023-24 and projected in 2024-25.
- Information on how resources within the Education and Welsh Language MEG are being used to support learners in post-16 education with the impact of cost of living pressures, and to address the impact of deprivation on outcomes (including, for example, through additional hardship funding for providers, or through existing student support funding such as the Education Maintenance Allowance).
- Budget provision for the roll out of universal free school meals in primary schools in 2024-25 and whether any budget is needed for this in 2025-26, given the roll out completed in September 2024.
- A further breakdown of the funding provided to local authorities in 2024-25 for the universal provision of free school meals.
- Any other funding within the Education MEG for initiatives to tackle the cost of living and the deprivation/attainment negative correlation, for example school holiday

enrichment/summer of fun/food and fun projects, including an explanation of how these projects and funding streams relate to each other

Education workforce

- Details of budget allocations to finance Initial Teacher Education (ITE), including funding and initiatives targeted at addressing shortages in particular subjects or areas, and any assessment that has been made of their efficacy and value for money.
- Details of budget allocations to support professional learning for current teachers, including in light of the ongoing implementation of education reforms.
- Information on funding provided by the Welsh Government to the Education Workforce Council.
- Details of any budget provision for meeting the costs of the teachers' pay award for academic year 2024/25 including a breakdown between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 financial years and the respective mechanisms used (whether direct grant or incorporated into the local government settlement).
- Information on any funding to support policy regarding the supply teaching workforce.

Curriculum reform

- Information on funding to support the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales.

Emotional and mental health of children and young people

- Budget provision from the Education MEG in 2025-26 for the whole-school/system approach to emotional and mental health.
- Details of funding from the Health and Social Care MEG to complement work in schools on this area.
- Information on any budget provision to support the emotional and mental health of young people in post-16 education.
- Budget provision for the action plan and wider response to tackle peer on peer sexual harassment among learners.

Pupil absence

- Information on any specific budget provision to address rates of pupil absence or an identification of which budget lines support such work more generally.

Sport and physical activity

- Information on how the Education MEG supports the provision of sport and physical activity for children and young people, whether inside or outside school, and how this relates to any funding in the Health and Social Care MEG such as for Healthy Weight, Healthy Wales.

Support for Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners

- Details of funding to support the education of Minority Ethnic and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners in 2025-26 and how this is being distributed as part of the LAEG.

Additional Learning Needs

- An updated assessment of the pressures facing local authorities, schools, and colleges in delivering current SEN/ALN provision, the impact of additional funding in previous years and whether further additional funding will be maintained/provided in 2025-26.
- Information on funding provision for the implementation of the 2018 Act, including an updated assessment of whether the ALN reforms are proving to be cost-neutral.
- Information on how funding for ALN provision is featuring in the review of local authority mainstream school funding.
- The latest position on funding for the training of educational psychologists in Wales and any grant funding arrangement with higher education institutions.

Estyn

- Details of Estyn's core budget allocation for 2025-26 and which MEG this is located in, as well as the rationale for this.
- Details of any additional funding from the Education MEG for Estyn's role in education reforms.

Qualifications

- Details of funding allocated to Qualifications Wales in 2025-26 and details of any additional funding for its work on qualifications reform in the context of the new Curriculum for Wales and vocational qualification reforms.

Welsh in education

- Details of allocations in the Education MEG to support the Welsh Government’s policies for Welsh in education, and the education sector’s role in meeting the Cymraeg 2050 target of one million Welsh speakers.
- How allocations in the Education MEG relate to other budgets supporting the Welsh language, for example the Welsh Language Action in the Central Services and Administration MEG (as of the 1st Supplementary Budget 2024-25).
- Whether there is specific ring-fenced funding for implementing the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill or if this will be met within existing Welsh Language and Welsh in Education BELs.
- Information on funding allocated for enhancing the Welsh in education workforce.

Early years education and childcare

- Whether the funding in the LAEG to ensure harmonisation of funding rates of early childhood education in non-maintained settings with the Childcare Offer is continuing in 2025-26.
- Details of any other funding from the Education MEG to support the non-maintained sector’s delivery of early childhood education and the Curriculum for Wales, and how this relates to funding for the responsibilities of the Minister for Children and Social Care in relation to early years and childcare.

Youth work

- Details of how the 2025-26 Education MEG supports statutory and voluntary youth services and budget provision for meeting the Programme for Government commitments in respect of strengthening youth services.
- Details of how the 2025-26 Education MEG supports the Youth Work Strategy for Wales and the work of the Implementation Board.

Offender learning

- Information on budget provision in 2025-26 and any changes to how this will be spent compared to previous years.

Further education, sixth forms and adult community learning

- Details of the complete 2024-25 allocations to further education colleges, to include the amounts of all components of the allocation (i.e. full-time, part-time, part-time allowance,

deprivation, sparsity and Welsh-medium allowances, maintenance allowance and the Adult Learning Wales adjustment).

- Details of any hypothecated funding to further education institutions or Sixth Forms beyond their usual core grants.
- Details of any funding provided in the 2025-26 budget for achieving pay parity and/or to meet any pay award to further education institutions and Sixth Forms, including an explanation as to the sufficiency of the funding to meet in full any agreed pay award / pay equivalency over the period of this budget.
- The allocation for Adult Community Learning.
- The complete 2023-24 and 2024-25 programme values used in the calculation of FE and Sixth Form funding.

Higher education, and post-16 student financial support

- Details of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) allocation, including details of any hypothecated funding, or funding which is intended for specific activities including mental health and student well-being.
- Details of any 2025-26 allocation intended for the delivery of degree apprenticeships and if it is intended to be used to recruit new apprentices or to teach out existing apprentices.
- Details of any capital funding to be made available to CTER, including any conditions to be placed on it by the Welsh Government.
- Details of any contingencies / reserves / non-allocated funds within any of the 2025-26 tertiary education related BELs, including the BELs within the post-16 Learner Support Action; details of how the funds are / can be deployed; and details of any deployment of them during 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Other post-16 education provision

- Details of Personal Learning Account funding.
- Details of the Welsh in Education budget including any allocation for the Coleg Cenedlaethol.
- Details of funding for the International Learning Exchange Programme (Taith).

Young Person's Guarantee

- Details of budget provision from the Education MEG which contributes to the Young Person's Guarantee and how this relates to funding from the Economy, Energy and Planning MEG.

Capital funding for school and college infrastructure

- Information on budget provision for the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme and progress of the programme to date, including expenditure and numbers of projects completed/approved to date under Band B.
- Confirmation that Band A is now complete and the final expenditure and number of projects.
- An updated assessment of the implications of the cost of living, for example energy prices and construction costs, for the Sustainable Communities for Learning programme, including any impact on the progress and costs of projects.
- The financial implications from the Welsh Government's carbon net zero policies and how this affects the 2025-26 draft Education MEG.

Capital funding for childcare

- Information on capital funding from the Education MEG for the Childcare Offer and Flying Start programme and any allocations for the purposes of the commitment to roll out Flying Start childcare to all 2 year olds.

Capital funding for the Community Focused Schools initiative

- Information on arrangements for funding aimed at increasing the community focused nature of education estates and adapting premises for community use.