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Peredur Owen Griffiths MS
Chair, Finance Committee
Senedd Cymru

By email

22nd January 2025

Dear Chair,

We are writing to you regarding NEU Cymru's concerns with funding in education in Wales, as the Finance Committee consults on the publish Draft Budget 25-26.

We welcome that the Welsh Government has provided outlined extra funding to the education budget. However, we have concerns this may not reach the frontline. We have updated the letter we wrote to you in December.

Our members enter education to educate and support children in their learning, but the financial situation in education means our members are struggling to fulfil this aim. We believe this is a critical budget for Welsh Government to invest in the future of Wales, and support the education system.

“The system is broken and now crumbling. Our school is barely able to run with the limited number of staff and resources. Children's needs cannot be met due to lack of staff. Buildings are in disrepair, teachers and TAs are exhausted from the workload. Something needs to be done urgently. Schools should be funded properly, and the government need to invest in the future of our children.” **Teacher, Conwy**

We conducted a poll of our members which highlights schools and colleges struggling for funding, and unable to provide enough resources (like books and pens), support children with additional learning needs (ALN), or employ enough teachers or support staff to provide the education children

deserve. We have included some of the quotes from that survey across our response here.

We highlight some areas of particular challenge below.

Local authority funding

Clear guidance is needed to ensure that funding from the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) gets to schools. Much could be done to resolve the funding fog in Wales, as our members see huge differentiation between local authorities. Welsh Government needs to reexamine the way that monies are divided between the local authorities, and guarantee funding reaches schools. We need to ensure that the education budget is protected at every level – to support our workforce and ensure children get the education they deserve.

Eighty-nine per cent (89%) of respondents in our survey said that there aren't enough teachers and support staff in their school / college to provide the education the students deserve. When asked if there was enough money available to ensure that more teachers and support staff can be appointed if required, fifty-one per cent (51%) said that the school / college needs more funding to be able to appoint all the staff they need, and a further forty-one per cent (41%) said that the school / college is in real trouble with urgent funding needed to appoint all the staff they need.

Whilst we welcomed the further £14.436m to local authorities through the Local Government settlement in 2024-25, we have seen schools and colleges' costs rise. Whilst Welsh Government struggle to recruit potential teachers into training¹, we saw a significant year for redundancies. As the Annual School Census data shows:

- There were 24,297 full-time equivalent qualified teachers in maintained schools, down 587 compared with January 2023.²

The last budget has not protected schools and colleges from having to make further cuts in provision, it is vital that this education budget does.

Fifty-three per cent (53%) of respondents in our survey told us that the school / college building that they work in wasn't suitable for learning. When asked if there was enough money available to ensure that any repairs / amendments can be carried out, two-thirds (65%) said that the school / college needs more funding to be able to carry out repairs and a further seventeen per cent (17%) said that the school / college is in real trouble with urgent funding needed.

¹ Only 57% of those who registered in 2014 were registered as teachers in 2024. EWC

² <https://www.gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2024-html>

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Reform

Eighty-one per cent (81%) of respondents in our survey said that students with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are not getting the support they need to enable them to engage fully in their learning.

“ALN is at crisis point. We are seeing such an increase in the children's needs and the number of children with complex needs that require specialist input entering mainstream school. We do not have the space, resources or staff to adequately support these children” **Teacher, Swansea**

The recent Children, Young People and Education Committee reports³ should make for sobering reading, and clearly show how more support is needed to ensure that ALL children have access to the education they deserve.

We welcomed the extra £25 million for ALN Coordinators (ALNCos) to move onto leadership pay. But we have huge concerns that more support is needed for ALNCos, as they struggle to find the time to complete the administration associated with the role. Time outside the classroom costs money, and this is money that schools don't have.

Furthermore, as schools and colleges have delegated duties under the ALNET Act to support children, (who would previously have been supported by local authorities), they are trying to support children without the adequate funds.

“Our school is really struggling. The teachers are finding it very difficult to meet the needs of their children. We have many children with complex needs and cannot support them or staff. This is the same for children with ALN, especially since the withdrawal of funds for 1-1 support.” **Senior Leader, Cardiff**

We cannot continue to have a situation where children and young people do not have access to the support they need. Regardless of declining figures of identified children⁴, we know they are still in our classrooms. Educators need access to support services from local authorities to ensure that they can support children with ALN at the earliest opportunity, and the funding to provide the adjustments they need.

³ <https://business.senedd.wales/mglssueHistoryHome.aspx?lId=40923>

- ⁴ There were 52,152 pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) or special educational needs (SEN) in maintained schools (11.2% of all pupils), down from 63,089 (13.4%) at January 2023.

<https://www.gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2024-html>

“Every year we face the possibility of redundancies which is ridiculous, we are losing support staff left right and centre so the education for children with ALN suffers!” **Primary Teacher, Wrexham**

When asked if there was enough money available to ensure that students with ALN receive the education they deserve, forty-one per cent (41%) said that the school / college needs more funding as they can't provide all the support they need, and a further forty-five per cent (45%) said that the school / college is in real trouble with urgent funding needed to provide all the support they need.

Behaviour

“I have taught in Flintshire for 28 years and this is the worst year I have ever experienced. Poor behaviour, lack of resources, huge needs of learners as no specialist settings available, not enough staff, buildings & amenities in desperate need of repair. I am considering leaving the profession!”

Primary Teacher, Flintshire

We have seen schools across Wales take strike action, linked to behaviour in schools, and the way in which the leadership team is managing this. NEU Cymru are clear – we don't want to nurture a situation where children's behaviour becomes the focus of a school which is struggling to support children with ALN and other needs. This is clearly about schools having the resources to support everyone, no matter what their needs. As we have highlighted above, schools don't have enough money to support children with ALN, we believe this is a key factor in terms of behaviour in our schools.

Absence rates remain high, with schools needing support to help children with attendance. Not all schools will have access to a pastoral care team, but they cannot support children without access to other services – including local authorities and CAHMs.

- Overall, 29% of pupils have met the persistent absence threshold of 10% of sessions missed for this academic year, down from 30.2% over the same period in the 2022/23 academic year.

Clear too is that families need support. And whilst schools try and help families in need, they cannot do this alone – they need access to all the support services which local authorities should be able to provide. Cutting the funding to support services is having a direct impact in our schools, as they try to do more with less.

Workload

“Having been a teacher for over 20 years, I am now at breaking point. Work has become unmanageable. We are so understaffed that we all face covering lunch duties and working extra hours (over and above) just to keep the school ‘ticking over’.” **Primary Teacher, Monmouthshire**

Excessive workload continues to be the leading cause of workplace stress and mental health issues, as 94% of respondents to our members mental health and wellbeing survey in 2023, said that workload impacted on their emotional health and wellbeing.

The percentage of days lost due to mental health issues has risen by 17% between 21/22 and 22/23 (latest available figures), representing a quarter of the days lost to sickness absence. In total, 5,583 education professionals took sickness absence due to poor mental health during this period.

Despite settling our dispute with the Welsh Government in March last year, the education workforce has seen little meaningful change in terms of workload in our classrooms. Clearly workload is costing Wales money, as the leading cause of poor mental health in the workplace.

From a funding perspective, workload has increased as more pressure is placed on the workforce to adapt and change their practice, carry out more and more tasks, and support the increasingly wide needs of children, without an increase in time outside of the classroom. There is minimal funding for cover. And yet an increasing demand to attend training as new initiatives keep coming, without sufficient resources attached.

Reducing workload must be a priority for the next Welsh Government budget.

Ninety-three per cent (93%) of respondents in our survey said that staff aren't able to complete most of their workload during their working day at school / college and don't have a good work / life balance. When asked if there was enough money available to ensure that staff have more time outside the classroom for planning, preparation and assessment so that they don't take most of their work home with them and have a better work / life balance, nearly half (49%) said that the school / college needs more funding to be able to provide all the time outside the classroom for planning, preparation and assessment that the staff need, and a further third (34%) said that the school / college is in real trouble with urgent funding needed to provide this time for the staff.

Child poverty

- 29.3% of pupils aged 5 to 15 were known to be eligible for free school meals or transitionally protected, up from 28.7% at January 2023.⁵

“We have an incredible and hard-working staff who cannot do their job because of lack of funding. Every year cuts are being made and at the moment our school is running in deficit, and difficult choices are being made every day. Our staff are doing an amazing but impossible job. With the correct funding we have the potential to be incredible, but everyone is being pushed to the limit”. **Senior Leader, Bridgend**

With rising number of children living in poverty in Wales (29%), NEU Cymru have welcomed the roll-out of free school meals (FSM) to all primary aged children. However, it is vital that free school meals are available to all children, regardless of their stage of education. Our members are clear – children need not to be hungry whilst they are in school.

We supported the Bevan Foundation’s work around the Welsh Benefits System⁶. However, we would ask that the Committee considers how automatic enrolment to FSM and Pupil Development Grant (PDG), can be used in a positive way, to ensure that children receive FSM, now that transitional protection has been removed.

In England, Pupil Premium funding is guaranteed for 6 years (known as the Ever 6⁷). This allows schools to plan their interventions for pupils who are eligible for FSM (eFSM). In Wales, the funding relies on parents’ revealing their financial situation at the time of data collection, and in many authorities, still requires a form to be completed. Clearly this ability to plan would help support schools in Wales, in terms of their financial stability, and their ability to support our most disadvantaged pupils.

As the threshold for eligibility for FSM has not increased in a number of years, its validity is questionable as a proxy measure. It is our view that the threshold for FSM eligibility must increase.

Forty-two per cent (42%) of respondents in our survey said that families who need extra support from the school / college, are not receiving this

⁵ <https://www.gov.wales/schools-census-results-january-2024-html>

⁶ <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/making-the-case-for-a-welsh-benefits-system-peoples-experiences/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-allocations-and-conditions-of-grant-2024-to-2025/pupil-premium-2024-to-2025-conditions-of-grant-for-local-authorities>

support whenever they need it. When asked if there was enough money available to ensure that those families get the support they need, a third (33%) said that the school / college needs more funding to be able to provide all the support that is necessary, a further quarter (25%) said that the school / college is in real trouble with urgent funding needed to ensure that those families get the support they need, and thirty percent (30%) said they don't know.

Pay

“This term I have spent hundreds of pounds on resources including glue, pens, paper, card and books for the class library as there are not enough funds to provide what is needed. I lead LLC throughout the school but have no TLR because there isn't enough money.” **Teacher, Swansea**

NEU Cymru members voted to support the 5.5% pay award – it is vital that this is fully funded. Too many times we have seen Welsh Government promise to fund this, give funding to local authorities, only for schools to be told that they do not have sufficient extra funding to meet actual salaries. Schools are not in a position to raise their own funds to support additional costs. Welsh Government must ensure that teachers' pay is fully funded by each local authority, and each individual funding formula does not mask under-funding of the sector.

“No good giving raises in pay if it isn't reflected in the school's budget.” **Senior Leader, Torfaen**

Curriculum and qualifications reform

“I am fed up with the lack of resources to provide the new 'experiential' curriculum and having to spend my own money on basic things like glue and pens.” **Teacher, South Wales**

The Curriculum for Wales and associated qualifications reform have not come without significant additional costs to the education sector. Our members should have been given sufficient time to plan and develop the resources to support the curriculum, assessment, and qualifications.

As the new qualifications are developed, we must ensure that teachers have enough time outside the classroom to plan, prepare and develop their approach and resources, in order to meet the needs of the children they teach. These qualifications must succeed in supporting all children to show what they can do, not focus narrowly on exams, or assessments that feel

like exams to everyone involved. With absence levels highest in year 11⁸, teachers must be supported to prepare for teaching of these new qualifications.

Proper professional learning allows people time outside of the classroom to learn, develop and reflect on their skills. However, time outside of the classroom costs money, so it vital that funding is given to every new initiative and change.

Eighty per cent (80%) of respondents in our survey said that there aren't enough resources available in their school / college to provide the education the students deserve. When asked if there was enough money available to ensure that these resources are plentiful, fifty-one per cent (51%) said that the school / college needs more funding to be able to provide all the resources they need, and a further thirty-four per cent (34%) said that the school / college is in real trouble with urgent funding needed to provide these resources.

School improvement

Plans to change school improvement appear to be largely driven by cost saving, rather than driven by workforce need. We do not feel that adequate support has or will be given to the workforce to enable them to embed collaboration in their practice. Again, time is needed outside of the classroom to develop this practice.

We are disappointed to see that subject specialist advisors will be decreased. It is our belief that what is left of the school improvement system should focus on support for the workforce, not another layer of accountability without sufficient resources to make changes in the classroom.

Welsh Language in Education Bill

NEU Cymru supports the general principles of the Bill, but if the education system is to implement the Welsh Language in Education Bill, then this must be fully funded. Teachers and support staff are going to need time outside of the classroom to ensure they have time to learn the language to a level where they can teach it.

Imposing a minimum amount of provision could have an adverse effect on staff, especially if staff aren't confident in teaching through the medium of Welsh. We surveyed our members in Wales on the White Paper proposals in 2023, and asked respondents to place themselves in one of seven

• ⁸ The attendance rate by year group for the academic year to date has been highest for pupils in Year 3 (92.6%) and lowest for pupils in Year 11 (79.0%).

Welsh speaking categories, e.g. I am a confident, but not fluent, Welsh speaker, and would like more support to be confident enough to teach through the medium of Welsh. Fifty-five per cent (55%) of respondents who either speak a lot of Welsh, are confident, or fluent Welsh speakers said they'd like more support to be confident enough to teach through the medium of Welsh.

Clearly it is only through investing in our current workforce now, that we will see enough Welsh speaking members of the workforce to fulfil the aims of the Bill.

Estyn

“Schools are at absolute breaking point! We cannot continue like this. The number of children with ALN and behaviour needs and the class sizes getting bigger and the taking away of staff, especially teachers and TAs. It's such an undesirable job! We go home exhausted every single night. How can we have a work life balance when the day-to-day things are draining us!” **Senior Leader, North Wales**

Whilst we recognise the differences in terms of inspection in both England and Wales, our members in Wales tell us that inspection is very stressful and has a significant impact on workforce well-being. Whilst the Chief Inspector refused to pause inspection, we do believe it is critical that the Welsh Government remit contains a requirement to carry out a mental health impact assessment of the whole workforce, regarding inspection.

Furthermore, we are concerned that Estyn's responsibilities in terms of the wellbeing of the workforce are non-statutory. We believe that learners in Wales can only truly be valued by the inspectorate if we are putting the well-being of the workforce as a top priority.

“Moral is low and mental health is beginning to decline. The state of our education system is dire for both students and teachers. As SLT too much of our time is taken up with budget matters and trying to manage staff shortages.” **Senior Leader, Cardiff**

In a funding landscape where schools are struggling to meet the needs of children and the workforce, it is time to think about how inspection can be more supportive for everyone.

Supply teachers

The increase in the number of support staff in Wales (from 16,556 in 2010 to 30,155 in 2023) and the rise in the number and strength of teaching agencies has led to an increase in schools utilising teaching assistants and agency workers to cover absent teachers, to the detriment of qualified supply teacher members.

“Teacher absences are not being covered by qualified supply staff. Schools are using assistants to cover. Every child deserves a qualified teacher. Schools are also employing the cheapest staff they can find available. This means experienced staff are not being chosen for job vacancies. This impacts on the quality of teaching across the school.” **Teacher, Bridgend**

This problem has continued to grow over the last 12 years and more of our supply teacher members are either not getting work, are forced to leave the profession or, even with the introduction of the new Welsh Government Commercial Delivery (WGCD) Supply Agency Framework Agreement for supply teachers (September 2023), where 41 agencies are currently on the framework, are being forced to register with agencies that have significantly lower rates of pay, to get work.

Part of the Welsh Government’s long-term programme of education reform included in the Programme for Government states that it wants to “*Develop a sustainable model for supply teaching that has fair work at its heart.*”

Nearly all local authorities no longer have a supply teacher pool which would pay teachers the correct rate based on their experience, and have turned exclusively to agencies to provide their schools with supply teacher cover. Because of this, many leave the profession as they cannot find ‘*fair work*’ as the rates of pay do not cover their living costs.

Agencies are costing schools money, whilst supply teachers are locked out of School Teachers’ Pay and Conditions (Wales) Document. Welsh Government need to implement a fully functioning national supply pool as a matter of urgency, and ensure supply teachers have equal rights to STPC(W)D in all teaching positions.

As we see high levels of absence amongst pupils, poor behaviour and a struggling workforce, it is clear Welsh Government needs to take action and support our supply workforce, and ensure there is a qualified teacher in every classroom.

As the recent Senedd Public Accounts and Public Administration Committee Report says:

110. The Committee has not heard a persuasive reason why the Welsh Government specified that the review carried out by IWPRB should not have included all supply teachers, including those employed by agencies. Whilst not all recommendations will be applicable to all supply teachers, we urge that the recommendations made with regard to those employed directly by schools and local authorities should be reviewed for their applicability to agency supply teachers.⁹

We believe that this is an opportunity for Welsh Government to fulfil its aims in terms of supply teachers and fair work, and stop public money going to supply agencies, which should be going towards supply teachers' pensions.

Further Education

In terms of FE, we need to know the Welsh Government sees and rewards their hard work, and are not making cuts to such a fragile sector.

We ask Welsh Government to prioritise educational funding and investment, as a matter of urgency. As funding the future of post-16 education moves to Medr, it is critical we retain the important mix of provision in the sector – ensuring both School Sixth Forms and the FE sector can provide education close to home for young people across Wales.

Participation in Higher Education (HE) is low in Wales, and needs a flourishing compulsory and post-16 sector in order to grow.

Workload, support services and ALN reform are particular issues for FE, and must be addressed. Doing more for less is not an option within the education system in Wales.

The future of education is at stake and schools, colleges, educators, and most importantly, students in Wales, are too important not to be properly funded.

We would be happy to speak to Committee about the issues we have raised here.

⁹ <https://business.senedd.wales/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=42660>

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N Fitzpatrick'.

Nicola Fitzpatrick

Ysgrifennydd Cymru Dros-dro / Interim Wales Secretary

CC – Mark Drakeford, Finance Secretary, Welsh Government

Lynne Neagle, Education Secretary, Welsh Government