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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

Vikki Howells AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Addysg Bellach ac Uwch
Minister for Further and Higher Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

25 February 2026

Dear Buffy,

Thank you for the invitation to appear in front of the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 4 February and your continued work on boosting educational standards and for your commitment to improving the lives of children and young people in Wales.

Please find below additional information requested along with our response to the questions we were unable to reach during the session.

Evaluation report on community-focussed schools

We committed to share a copy of the independent process evaluation of our Community Focused School approach. The evaluation was undertaken by Alma Research. Their report has been published (24 February) and can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.wales/process-evaluation-community-focused-schools-funding>.

The final report from the Literacy Expert Panel

A written statement on the work of the Expert Literacy Panel will be made shortly, this will include their report which will be shared with the Committee separately.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Further information on assessments on the affordability of increasing student loan outlay at a greater rate than the UK Government and the impact this will have on future support packages

Officials would be happy to offer the committee a technical briefing on your question around student loan outlay.

Details on the number of applicants placed in higher education from the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation quintile 1

2025 Entry

In 2025, there were a total of 3,225 Welsh domiciled placed applicants from the lowest quintile of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD Q1). This figure represents a 1.8% increase compared to the number of placed applicants from WIMD Q1 in 2024.

Furthermore, 18.2% of the 18-year-old population within WIMD Q1 were successfully placed in higher education in 2025. This placement rate is 0.3 percentage points lower than the WIMD Q1 entry rate recorded in 2024.

Source: [UCAS Undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2025 | UCAS](#))

2026

For the 2026 academic year, by the January equal consideration deadline, there were 3,340 Welsh domiciled applicants from WIMD Q1. This marks a 7.1% increase compared to the number of applicants from WIMD Q1 at the same point in 2025.

Additionally, 21.0% of the 18-year-old population from WIMD Q1 made an application by the January equal consideration date for 2026 entry. This is an increase of 0.9 percentage points in the applicant rate compared to the same point in 2025.

Source: [2026 cycle applicant figures – 14 January deadline | UCAS](#))

In response to questions unreached:

Can the Minister provide an update on whether any decision has been made on the continuation of Taith with respect to the decision to rejoin Erasmus from 2027? Would there be any change in Taith's activity when both schemes are operating at the same time?

We remain committed to ensuring continuity of opportunities for learners and as the details of our participation in Erasmus+ continue to develop, we will carefully consider the implications.

Officials are engaging closely with UK Government counterparts and the other Devolved Administrations on the shaping of Erasmus+, and there is ongoing Ministerial-level dialogue to ensure that Wales's priorities, including the strengths of Taith, are fully reflected. We are committed to ensuring that the lessons learned and good practice developed through Taith inform the future delivery of Erasmus.

Our priority remains the successful delivery of the current Taith programme and ensuring that learners continue to benefit from the international opportunities they deserve, to ensure

there is no gap in provision, and that learners across all sectors in Wales have access to as many opportunities as possible, regardless of which scheme facilitates these opportunities. As such, we have confirmed an extension of Taith until 2028, with all Taith funded projects due to conclude by 31 August 2027. Erasmus+ funded projects are then expected to begin in the 2027–28 academic year, meaning there will not be an overlap in project delivery between the two programmes.

The Committee is expecting to receive an end of financial year report from Welsh Government in April 2026 which we have been told will include an assessment of Seren’s progress since the previous assessment in 2018. Could you provide an update on any insights or lessons learned that you’re aware of at this point?

Seren monitors participation and learner engagement with the programme on an ongoing basis. This data helps us check whether the programme meets learner needs, demonstrate value for money and make improvements where necessary.

Based on this data, we decided to change how we deliver the programme. From April 2026, a dedicated team will lead delivery, with an updated support programme for schools and colleges launching in September.

As mentioned previously, Seren's end-of-year data report will be presented to this committee in April 2026. This will provide a benchmark to measure the impact of changes to the programme.

We have also commissioned an independent review of Seren. This will assess progress since 2018 and whether the changes made under the 2023 operational strategy are working. An interim report is due over the summer, with the final report by the end of the year. We are updating how we identify learners for Seren. The new guidance will be evidence-based and consistent across Wales.

Could the Minister provide an update on the work of her post-16 Ministerial Advisory Group, including what issues have been covered so far?

The Tertiary Education Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) was established to provide strategic, informed and constructive advice on the major challenges and opportunities facing Wales’s tertiary education system. The Group has met on two occasions, and third meeting is scheduled for early March.

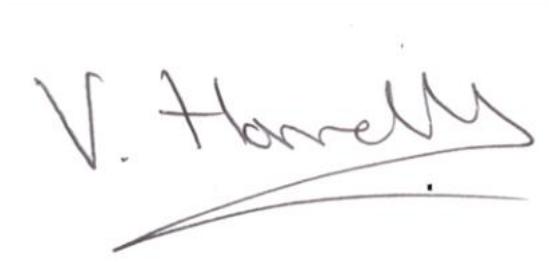
On 13 February, a Written Statement was issued updating Members on the Group's purpose and its work to date: [Written Statement: Tertiary Education Ministerial Advisory Group – Purpose, Remit and Update \(13 February 2026\) | GOV.WALES.](#)

Yours sincerely,



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