

**UCAC's response to the Finance Committee's consultation on the 2015-16 Draft Budget
September 2014**

1. In your opinion, what has been the impact of the Welsh Government's 2014-15 budget?

If one of the intentions of the final budget for 2014-15 was to demonstrate *'the actions the Government is taking to...break the link between poverty and educational attainment'*, UCAC believes that the overall investment made in education in Wales in the 2014-15 budget is insufficient to ensure this.

We acknowledge the pressure on the budget, and we appreciate the announcements made on protecting school budgets, the additional 1% on the annual budget, as well as the pupil deprivation grant. However, the reality is that school budgets have shrunk considerably. Naturally, costs increase and entities such as schools are greatly affected. Doubts remain over the effective transfer of funding from authorities to schools, though we welcome the commitment made by the Minister for Education and Skills, in a letter to UCAC dated March 3, 2014, to ensure that full monitoring occurs to that effect.

The reality is that the 2014-15 budget provides insufficient funds to ensure the best education for all, irrespective of background, in our country's schools. There has been a huge impact on schools, teachers and pupils with regard to planning for September 2014. There has been a major shift in labour demand in the sector, and there have been several examples of members seeing their hours cut this year, as well as an increase in those being made redundant. Class sizes have expanded, and this has affected the attention given to each pupil and their actual attainment. As a result, we have already seen a major impact on the workload of members. The range of subjects provided in secondary schools is decreasing, and there are obvious questions regarding the sustainability of several schools and resources.

Post-16 funding for schools continues to be an issue of significant concern to UCAC. The funding system creates unhealthy competition between individual schools within authorities, and fails to take into account the dynamics of student numbers and school success. Indeed, rather than seeing the best educational experience secured for our students, many members have witnessed a reduction in curricular provision for students in September 2014, which is having an impact on individual students' educational pathways and on the professional development of members. The sustainability of sixth forms is at stake in this regard, and it is often asked whether the removal of school provision is the ultimate goal.

UCAC has real concerns over whether general post-16 needs are being met. This is a major concern in relation to transport, and the significant concomitant threat to linguistic continuity that will arise as a result of funding cuts. Many local authorities are now charging for transport, and this is having a significant impact on students who have no choice but to use school transport to receive Welsh-medium education. There is great concern that this would further increase the number of NEETs. UCAC is calling for adequate funding to ensure consistency across Wales in terms of transport, and to ensure that there is no discrimination against any medium.

Another area in which UCAC has concerns in terms of the 2014-15 budget is Welsh for Adults. Concerns were raised about the 7% cut that was originally announced, but the 8% cut that has just been announced is very disappointing. The cuts are

expected to be administered from September 2014, even though the courses are all in place and recruitment has been completed. Again, there has been a major impact on provision and on jobs, running counter to the Government's policies and strategies on promoting and facilitating the use of Welsh. UCAC believes that strengthening the link between Welsh for Adults provision and linguistic planning for various workforces (education, health, child care, social care) is a potential way forward in this regard.

2. Looking at the indicative budget allocations for 2015-16, do you have any strategic or general concerns, or concerns about any specific areas?

3. What are your expectations relating to the 2015-16 draft budget proposals? How prepared is your financial institution for the 2015-16 financial year, and how robust is your ability to plan for the coming years?

Clearly, the situation regarding school numbers is dynamic; past experience shows that policy emphasis changes constantly, and the needs and methods of assessment remain blurred. It is therefore necessary to ensure adequate funding to cope with these changes. The budget does not allow for the Department for Education and Skills to transform the current situation overnight without putting too much pressure on teachers and schools. Indeed, it has been asked whether the budget will enable our schools to maintain the provision they are expected to offer, as seen above.

4. The Committee would like to focus on several specific areas in scrutinising the budget. Do you have any specific comments in relation to the areas identified below?

In looking at the Welsh Government's legislative programme and the situation regarding the Welsh language, we wish to draw your attention to UCAC's concerns about the White Paper on Additional Learning Needs (ALN). These are specific concerns arising from the lack of reference to the Welsh language, and concern that the workload will fall on school ALN coordinators. To mitigate these concerns, investment will be required to ensure appropriate levels of training, to ensure release from teaching duties to undertake this work (especially if interagency working is expected), and to facilitate the use of Welsh. Therefore, adequate funding will be required to ensure adherence to the basic principle established in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, namely that Welsh should be treated no less favourably than English.

We know that there are currently significant shortcomings in Welsh-medium provision for children and young people with ALN, often due to lack of capacity/expertise within the relevant workforces. UCAC believes strongly in the right of any child, young person and his or her family to receive the appropriate provision and service through their language of choice, be that English or Welsh. However, the argument is stronger still when dealing with children from Welsh-speaking families who have not yet had significant exposure to the English language and who are, in effect, monolingual Welsh speakers. Any assessment of a monolingual child, or any provision for that child, would have to be in Welsh to be meaningful. Moreover, we must ensure the right of a child/young person and his or her family to discuss Individual Development Plans (IDPs), and conduct appeals, and multi-agency collaboration in Welsh. These need to be proactive features rather than things that

families have to insist upon in order to ensure specialist Welsh-medium provision (0-25) and to ensure linguistic continuity.

UCAC takes the very strong view that the right to Welsh-medium provision should be on the face of the proposed Bill. Funding will be needed to ensure that any Act gives due attention to this key issue.

UCAC has significant concerns that the burden of formulating and implementing IDPs will fall on schools, and on ALN coordinators in particular. Serious questions have arisen regarding the capacity of schools to deal with the needs of children and young people with ALN at present, particularly with the emphasis on maximizing inclusion in mainstream provision. There is a danger that the situation will deteriorate significantly as a result of these proposals, and that schools will be blamed for any failures. This is in light of the fact that there are as many as 103,791 pupils with additional learning needs in Welsh schools.

The considerations cited above will need to be stated clearly on the face of the Bill, and funding will need to be in place to ensure this.

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