

Huw Lewis AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg a Sgiliau
Minister for Education and Skills



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref SF/HL/4098/14

Ann Jones, AM
Chair,
Children, Young People & Education Committee
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

16 December 2014

Dear Ann,

Children, Young People and Education Committee Enquiry into the Educational Outcomes of Children from Low Income Families.

I write in response to your enquiries following my appearance before the Committee on 3 December. You requested further information on the following 3 topics:

A note on the staff vacancy rates in each regional consortium;

A breakdown of the School Challenge Cymru funding allocation between the regional consortia and schools.

OECD: A comparison of European countries that have rapidly shifted to achieve the 500 score in each of the three domains of PISA.

Staff vacancy rates in each regional consortium

Regional education consortia are moving away from a traditional advisory service model. In future, school improvement will centre on teacher to teacher and head teacher to head teacher support, facilitated by consortia. However, there has to be a transition and we are in that transition period now.

Consortia have been downsizing their full time advisory staff and gradually replacing them with a more flexible arrangement of experienced teachers and head teachers who might offer 1 or 2 days per week. I appreciate that transition is not easy and that some requests arrive at relatively short notice to provide support to other schools. Our intention is to have a system that is more resilient, where stronger schools build up additional capacity over time and are able to offer support to other schools when needed.

The good news is that head teachers are already commenting favourably on the move towards the new model and can see that significant benefits will emerge over the coming years. I received this feedback first hand at my recent visits to the regional consortia.

A breakdown of the School Challenge Cymru funding

All of our Pathways to Success Schools have received an initial allocation of funding. These were agreed following a period of consideration and close scrutiny of each school's plan by the Schools Challenge Cymru Champions and my officials. The allocations are based on each school's individual needs and will support the implementation of a bespoke package of improvement activity.

As Schools Challenge Cymru Advisers (SCCA) work with their schools, additional needs will inevitably emerge or be identified and these will require further action. To manage this, and to ensure that the Challenge maintains pace, the allocation of funding must be dynamic within the overall envelope. Funding levels, including SCCA time, stand at just over £11.5m.

In addition to the funding being made available to schools directly for improvement activity, each education consortium has been allocated Schools Challenge Cymru funding to build capacity at a regional level and to drive collaboration. This activity includes investing in Improvement Hubs, developing school to school partnerships and continuing professional development for leaders and practitioners and is designed to ensure that Schools Challenge Cymru will have a positive impact on the wider education system, leading to an emphasis on school-led self improvement. Funding levels currently stand at around £3.7m.

Given the need for fluidity, final funding allocations for year 1 of the programme for each of the Pathways to Success Schools will be published at the end of the summer term in 2015.

A comparison of European Countries that have rapidly shifted to achieve the 500 score in each of the three domains of PISA

It is generally recognised that the top performing education systems in the world attain a point score of over 500 in PISA. At Cabinet on 15 September, it was agreed that our ambition should be to achieve scores of 500 in each of reading, mathematics and science in the PISA tests sat in 2021. At the same time, we will significantly reduce the percentage of learners only achieving PISA proficiency level 2 or below. In the 2012 PISA tests, 23 countries achieved over 500 in the main domain compared with 17 countries getting over 500 points in the main domain area in 2009. Top performing countries in the OECD continue to do better and strive for improvement; Wales should be doing the same.

The Wales average for mathematics in 2012 was 468 and is our weakest performance domain in PISA. To achieve the 500 score in mathematics would mean that a gap of 32 points would need to be bridged, a very challenging target. To achieve the 500 score in reading and science is still challenging although not of the same magnitude, with Wales scoring 480 and 491 respectively in PISA 2012.

It is possible to make significant improvements in points scores between PISA cycles – the Czech Republic achieved a 15 point increase in reading between 2009 and 2012, Latvia achieved a 9 point increase in mathematics in this time and Germany has seen sustained improved performance in PISA since 2003.

In working towards the 500 score ambition, a number of interventions are being put in place. These aim to ensure that Wales will improve teaching and learning for all pupils through a dynamic curriculum that enables young people to apply learnt knowledge and develop the skills to allow them to solve problems in the real world. These are the sorts of skills that the PISA study tests.

DfES has put in place a delivery plan to prepare and support the school network in readiness for the implementation of the new GCSEs in English/Welsh, Mathematics and Mathematics-Numeracy. The content of the new GCSEs requires a major shift in teaching methods to ensure learners are able to demonstrate PISA-type skills.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Huw Lewis', written in black ink.

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