

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE COMMITTEE

Ceredigion would like to thank the National Assembly for Wales - Children and Young People Committee for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee's inquiry into the implementation of the *Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009*. Committee Members have stated that a number of issues especially pertinent to rural areas such as choices, travel and transport, digital learning and the provision of Welsh medium education, have arisen in Committee discussions. We will focus mainly on these issues but will also set these issues in Ceredigion's context so that Members are aware of the background and local mandate that we are working within.

CEREDIGION CHARACTERISTICS

- Ceredigion has the second lowest population density across Wales.
- The average weekly earnings in Ceredigion are the lowest across Wales while house prices are among the highest.
- Among the highest percentage of self employed workers in Wales.
- High dependence on the Public sector for jobs.
- Free school Meals in Ceredigion is 12.2%. This is the third lowest in Wales.
- Ceredigion has no special schools. Consequently all pupils receive educational provision within our seven secondary schools
- Surplus places in secondary schools are very high at 25%.
- Ceredigion has a political mandate to keep secondary education in the six market towns. The towns are well disbursed across the county. Distances between a town and its nearest neighbouring town in Ceredigion generally ranges between 12 miles and 16 miles. The transport infrastructure is of poor quality.
- Direct bus journeys between the major towns generally take half an hour. However, there are limited public transport links.
- Coleg Ceredigion Further Education has two sites located in two of the main towns, Aberystwyth and Cardigan. Coleg Ceredigion is the smallest Further Education College in Wales.
- Broadband links in general are poor. Tregaron and Lampeter were the worst locations for broadband speeds in Wales and were among the 20 worst locations for broadband speeds in the UK. Broadband links within schools themselves are good
- Introduction of a flexible and varied school infrastructure including 3-19 schools as part of making educational delivery affordable and sustainable in rural areas.
- Very low levels of NEETs. the percentage of pupils classified as NEET after finishing year 11 is the lowest in Wales.
- Second highest percentage of Year 11 pupils choosing to return to the 6th form.

CEREDIGION 14-19 STRATEGY

The main strategies for establishing the Learning Measure in Ceredigion can be summarised as follows.

- Build on the strong outcomes achieved by the existing school structure in Ceredigion by establishing 3-19 schools and maintaining formal hub and spoke collaboration arrangements between schools. [Appendix](#)
- Focus on developing strong literacy and numeracy skills within a broad curriculum.
- Develop an ICT based learning culture, where every learner has access to, course content and learning environment from any part of the school or from home at any time of day.
- Build on the excellent pastoral care delivered through the school system and continue to develop the early intervention strategies that have improved pupil behaviour and engagement across all age ranges.

BENEFITS FOR THE LEARNER

The Measure has had a positive impact on learners.

Curricular Improvements

- Improved learner choice and increase the number Learning Paths open to them across wider fields.
- Increased average uptake of learning opportunities across all curriculum areas.
- Increased the flexibility within the curriculum and allowed learners to take advantage of personal learning provision.

Wellbeing improvements

- Promoted Learner Support services such as school counselling and learning coaches.
- Ensured that each secondary school has a Hafan and Encil¹ facility to support learner emotional and behaviour needs within each institution.
- Ensured that there is impartial Career Advisory Service within each institution.
- Ensured that each learner has Statement of Entitlement from the 14-19 Learning Network.
- Encouraged pupils to express their option on the provision through the annual “Learner’s Voice” questionnaire.
- Improved the Parity of Esteem between vocational courses and traditional courses in schools

¹ Hafan and Encil is an inclusion facility. The Hafan facility is a nurture group and Encil is a seclusion facility.

OUTCOMES ARISING FROM THE 14-19 MEASURE IN CEREDIGION

Implementing the 14-19 Measure in Ceredigion has led to a number of measurable benefits.

- There has been an effective focus on pupil welfare, for example through the counselling service. This has led to an improvement in behaviour and improved attendance rates.
 - The percentage of pupils in full time education at the end of year 11 has increased from 78% in 2006 to 86.2% in 2010.
 - Attendance rates in secondary schools have improved from 91.6% in 2007-08 to 92.5% the highest in Wales in 2010-11. Attendance is running at an unprecedented 94% so far in 2011-12
 - The number of days lost to fixed term exclusions lasting 6 days or more have fallen from 65 (2007-08) to 40 (2009 -2010). There have been no fixed term exclusions lasting 6 days or more during the first term of 2011-12. There were no permanent exclusions in 2010-11 or in the first term of 2011-12.

- We have seen a continuous improvement in the Level 2 and Level 3 threshold statistics over the past 4 years. We have also seen a significant improvement in the average wider point score since 2008.
 - Level 2 threshold results have improved from 61.6% in 2008 to 71.4% in 2011.
 - The average wider point score of 17 year old pupils have improved from 659 to 813 during the same period.

- There has been a significant increase in the number of courses offered to pupils including the number of courses offered through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, especially at post-16 pupils.

ISSUES ARISING WITH IMPLEMENTING THE LEARNING MEASURE

The following table summarises the main issues affecting the full realisation of benefits from the Learning measure.

Some of the issues such as resistance to change and communication with neighbouring authorities are best managed at a local level.

Other issues such as the rural economy, attracting more investment and job opportunities through the private sector, employment, broadband availability and travel costs are issues that require national support. Of these, transport is the biggest single challenge in implementing the Learning Measure.

Issue	Method of managing
<p>High travel costs and long travel times in rural areas. (Appendix 2)</p>	<p>Stats Wales data shows that Ceredigion spends £465 per pupil per annum transporting pupils to school compared with £109 per pupil in Cardiff. This is the most significant constraint facing providers in Ceredigion. Transport costs are not recognised within post 16 funding and this is a significant extra burden on the Local Authority.</p> <p>Joint timetabling between partner schools has helped to reduce cost, however it is not a fully sustainable model. The next step is to implement formal Hub and Spoke models as described in Appendix 1.</p> <p>Joining 6th forms together inevitably increases the distances travelled by pupils to access education. This increases pupil travel times and also travel costs. This is the case whether 6th forms are actually merged together or whether they virtually join together as part of a collaborative entity.</p> <p>These travel costs are not recognised in the post 16 course funding mechanism. This is placing rural authorities at a significant disadvantage and prevents the development of a fully sustainable solution</p>
<p>Sustainability of providing 30 courses in small secondary schools.</p> <p>The Audit Office identified that at least 150 pupils are required to maintain a sustainable 6th form. The most recent analysis of costs and funding performed in Ceredigion taking account of the 14-19 Learning Measure suggests that the actual breakeven point is higher, and is approximately 200 pupils.</p>	<p>The 6th forms of all but 1 secondary schools in Ceredigion is smaller than 150 pupils.</p> <p>The funding pressure is greater since the Welsh Government ceased to recognise sparsity and rurality in the post-16 funding equation. As a result Ceredigion has to substantially subsidise post 16 provision by over £300k annually which is 8% of the budget.</p> <p>We are addressing this issue in Ceredigion by encouraging the development of collaborative 6th form partnerships that follow a Hub and Spoke model. Under this model the schools in the partnership undertake joint selection of options and joint timetabling.</p> <p>However, as noted above, implementing any collaboration between post 16 providers, or merging any post 16 providers inevitably leads to increasing travel costs.</p> <p>Resources that would otherwise be used to develop the curriculum and improve quality of courses have to be diverted and used instead to enable student access.</p>
<p>Limited employment opportunities in Ceredigion limits pathways into employment and results in a skills drain from Ceredigion.</p>	<p>This is an issue that cannot be fully managed locally. Stats Wales shows that in the past two years, the average gross weekly earnings in Ceredigion has been the lowest in Wales.</p>

	<p>Ceredigion achievement rates are among the highest in Wales. However, there are limited employment opportunities. and the lowest salaries in Wales means that opportunity for high achieving academic or vocational well qualified apprenticeships to stay within the county. Hence, there is an outflow of the most qualified individuals from Ceredigion and this exacerbates the issues of rural poverty.</p> <p>Mid Wales has had minimal economic investment from WG. Economic investment is urgently required in rural mid Wales to reverse the downward economic spiral.</p>
Limited number of providers with expertise in vocational subjects in rural areas	<p>There are a limited number of external providers in Ceredigion and these are generally one or two person enterprises. There are continuity and quality risks associated with some of these smaller providers. Coleg Ceredigion is the smallest Further Education College in Wales and has limited expertise in certain areas</p> <p>School partnerships are encouraged to commission either Coleg Ceredigion or Hyfforddiant Ceredigion training providers if expertise already exists, or to invest in staff training where school staff members have the required expertise.</p>
Broadband capacity is low in Ceredigion and ICT facilities are in need of updating.	<p>We have developed and are implementing an ICT strategy aimed at improving the quality of ICT equipment and the quality of ICT support by pooling school funds.</p> <p>The Broadband capacity permits each school to run one Video conferencing link at a time. Using this resource, a maximum of 6 courses of the 60 AS and A-level can be delivered by video conference.</p> <p>We are investigating the benefits of commissioning electronic course materials for certain modules. This will permit pupils to learn certain subjects remotely. Teachers will hold tutorials to address problems.</p>
Ensuring the quality of courses provided in collaboration.	<p>We have developed service level agreements for the schools to use. We have ensured that all the schools have completed these service level agreements. These service level agreements set out quality targets for the courses provided in collaboration. If the quality measures are not met, the funding will be reduced.</p>
Surplus places in a rural area Appendix 3	<p>The rate of surplus places in Ceredigion primary schools is 23% and the rate of surplus places in Ceredigion secondary schools is 25%. We have calculated that the minimum number of surplus places that is economical in Ceredigion primary schools is 14%. A similar situation exists in secondary schools.</p> <p>Reducing surplus places will only yield net savings when the savings arising from closing secondary schools is higher than the additional costs of providing additional transport.</p>

Conclusion

Whilst the Measure has been broadly welcomed and has brought with it tangible benefits for pupils mainly in the form of:

- Wider choice leading to better outcomes;
- More pupil satisfaction that curriculum is meeting needs; as evidenced by better outcomes;
- Increased pupil enjoyment and engagement as evidenced by significantly improved attendance and behaviour.

Sustainability of progress will be difficult unless WG

- Broadens its definition of poverty especially in rural areas in education;
- accepts transport as a significant cost implication in delivery;
- allocates an appropriate weighting to the cost of Welsh medium delivery in a sparsely populated rural area.

Sustainability of progress will be difficult unless Ceredigion Local Authority and WG work together to:

- invest in the local economy to broaden and allow opportunities for pupils to use their wider and vocational skills locally;

The Local Authority needs to continue to deliver its programme of change.

APPENDIX 1 – THE HUB AND SPOKE MODEL

ACHIEVING THE LEARNING MEASURE – THE HUB AND SPOKE MODEL

Six out of the seven sixth forms in Ceredigion are small sixth forms with fewer than 150 pupils. It is not possible for all six of these sixth forms to each run 30 courses.

The key to providing pupils with 30 options is to minimise duplication of courses between neighbouring schools. The preferred solution to achieve this aim in Ceredigion is the hub and spoke model.

This hub and spoke solution for Ceredigion has been developed in close co-operation with Powys and Carmarthen County Councils. Both rural counties face similar challenges.

The hub and spoke model in Ceredigion can be summarised as follows:-

- Secondary schools will be partnered with one or two other schools.
- Partner schools will pool their post 16 budget.
- Schools within each partnership will jointly select option blocks. Between them, the schools will offer at least 30 course options..
- Travel costs and time wastage will be minimised by selecting one school within the partnership to be hub school. The hub school will provide a wider range of courses than the spoke schools.
- Pupils will have access to all subjects offered by the partnership.
- Time wastage due to travel will also be minimised by providing lessons in blocks of up to three hours in length.
- Travel costs will be met by the County Council and schools, not by the pupils in order to minimise NEETs.

APPENDIX 2 - TRANSPORT ISSUES

The main transport issues related to the Learning Measure are as follows:-

- The funding for post 16 education does not recognise high travel costs in rural areas.
- Longer travel times in rural areas have an impact on educational delivery.

TRAVEL COSTS

In rural areas, pupils are more widely dispersed. Secondary schools are smaller units and are located further apart. Transport costs are much higher in rural areas than in urban areas. The home to school transport cost in Powys and Ceredigion are £462 and £459 per pupil per annum. The home to school transport costs in Cardiff and Newport are £109 and £156 per pupil per annum. Furthermore there is more limited public transport in rural areas. This means that there is a greater need for Local Authorities to arrange transport for post 16 pupils in rural areas.

The Audit Office identified that at least 150 pupils were required to maintain a sustainable 6th form. In a sustainable sixth form unit, the funding received is equal to the expenditure incurred on delivering 6th form provision. The most recent analysis of costs and funding performed in Ceredigion taking account of the 14-19 Learning Measure suggests that the actual breakeven point is higher, and is approximately 200 pupils.

The 6th forms of most secondary schools in rural areas are smaller than 150 pupils. The size of 6th forms in Ceredigion in January 2011 is shown in the table below.

School	Number of pupils
Aberaeron	132
Aberteifi	100
Dyffryn Teifi	119
Llanbedr	122
Penglais	302
Penweddig	122
Tregaron	73

This means that the only way of creating sustainable units with more than 200 pupils is to join sixth forms together. Sixth forms can be physically joined together by merging two schools on a single site. The other option is to virtually join two schools together. Virtually joining two schools together involves treating the sixth forms of the two schools as a single entity; in this case the option blocks and the 6th form timetable must be jointly prepared and agreed.

In both the above cases, it will be necessary to increase pupil travel. Under the first option pupils will need to travel further distances to reach the new merged 6th form. Under the second option, pupils will need to travel between sites to attend some courses. Broadband capacities in Ceredigion limit the number of courses delivered by video conferencing to 3 out of the 30 courses.

One of the key priorities of the Welsh Government as noted in the 5 year plan is to improve “Post-16 staying on rates (including school, FE and training)”. Achieving this target in rural areas is dependent on local authorities paying for transport. It is likely that some young people would be deterred from attending school or college if they had to pay for their travel costs.

This means that implementing the Learning Measure is necessarily more expensive in rural areas than in more densely populated areas. The minimum additional cost is the additional travel costs required to transport to the single merged sixth form or to transport pupils from one site to another.

The actual travel costs will vary depending on a number of factors, including pupil numbers, travel distances, the population density and the number of pick up points and the availability of public transport routes. As an indication of travel cost, the additional travel costs arising from creating a single sixth form for three secondary school in mid Ceredigion was modelled to be a minimum of £200k per annum.

The County Council will need to demonstrate to stakeholders why we prefer to spend this £200k on transport costs to deliver the Learning Measure rather than on 5 teachers within the schools.

Over the next two years this additional travel costs will be funded using the RNDP. If the RNDP ceases then the Learning Measure can only be met if Ceredigion Council agrees to meet the travel costs itself. This will mean that some other Local Authority Services will need to be reduced in order to meet the additional travel costs.

TRAVEL TIME

In addition to a financial cost, joining 6th forms places a travel time penalty on pupils. The rural transport infrastructure is generally poor when compared with elsewhere in Wales. A significant minority of pupils will be required to travel long distances to access education. This is the case whether 6th forms are actually merged together or whether the virtually join together as part of a collaborative entity.

- Students travel longer distances to attend the post 16 unit and as a result have less time for extra-curricular activities.
- High travel times may deter some pupils from returning to education post 16.
- In the case of collaboration between 6th forms:-

- Lessons must be provided in 3 hour blocks to minimise travel costs. Teaching methods will need to change.
- Students will travel partially during the school day. This will reduce teaching contact hours. Students will have less opportunity to learn during the school day.

The factors noted above are likely to have a negative impact on young people achievements. This will prevent us from being able to fully realise the full benefits of the Learning Measure.

We need to continue manage the change to a more collaborative post-16 structure carefully. There will be a learning curve before we identify how best to manage the impact of pupil travel times. During this learning curve, pupil achievements may not improve as quickly as was hoped.

We ask that RNDP funding continues to be specifically available to support transport post-16 transport.

We highlight that there will be a learning curve as rural local authorities identify how best to manage the impact of higher pupil travel times.

APPENDIX 3 - THE LEARNING MEASURE AND SURPLUS PLACES

ADDRESSING SURPLUS PLACES

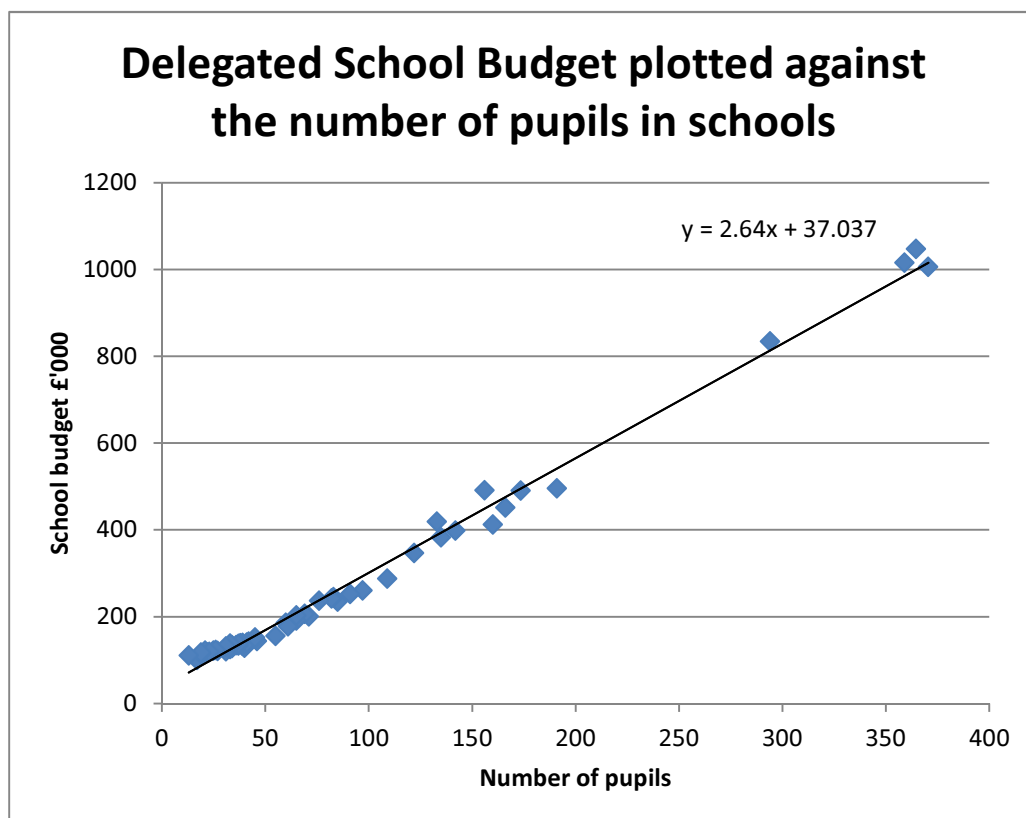
The past years have seen a fall in pupil numbers and as a result, the rate of surplus places in Ceredigion primary schools is 23% and the rate of surplus places in and Ceredigion secondary schools is 25%.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The education department in Ceredigion County Council have estimated that the minimum number of primary school surplus places that can be economically achieved in Ceredigion is 14%. This is higher than the 10% target set by the Welsh Government.

The methodology is summarised as follows:-

- It is possible to calculate the savings achieved by closing a school as £37,000. The model suggests that this is the case irrespective of the capacity of the school or the number of pupils on roll.



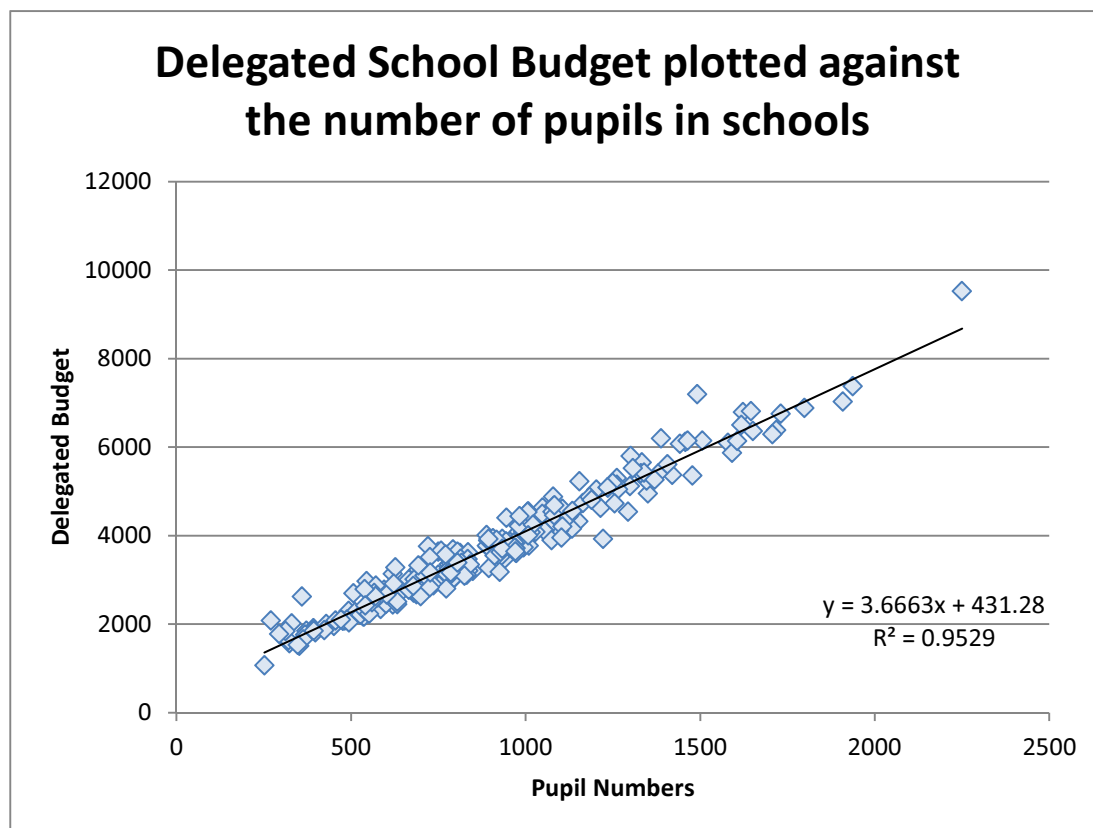
- The average cost of transport per pupil in Ceredigion is £465.
- We distributed schools into areas with their neighbouring schools and assessed whether school mergers or closures were likely to result in economic savings. we assumed that there is no restriction on capital. That is, any number of area primary schools or extensions can be built.

- In identifying future closures we came to the conclusion that 687 surplus places could be removed
- At this point, the rate of surplus places would fall from 23% to 14%.
- It is likely that trying to reduce the rate of surplus places further beyond 14% would result in more expensive education provision due to the impact of travel costs.

SUPRLUS PLACES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Surplus places can only be removed by closing schools. In the case of secondary schools we developed a model to estimate the savings that could be achieved from school closures and compared this figure with the actual additional travel costs that would arise.

The financial model suggests that secondary schools have a fixed cost of £431k per annum. This means that even if a school had no pupils, it would cost £431k per annum to run. It also means that if we were to close a secondary school, we would expect to make revenue savings of £431k per annum less any additional travel costs.



Travel costs in a rural county such as Ceredigion can be very significant. On average Ceredigion spends £465 per pupil per annum transporting pupils to school compared with £109 per pupil in Cardiff. We have analysed the additional travel costs that Ceredigion would incur under various school closure options.

The additional travel costs arising from closing most Ceredigion secondary schools would be higher than £431k.