

Comisiynydd y
Gymraeg
Welsh Language
CommissionerLynne Neagle AC
Children, Young People and Education Committee Chair
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

18 June 2018

Dear Lynne,

On the 27th of November 2017, we shared with the Children, Young People and Education Committee a briefing note on 'Welsh medium childcare and early years education provision'. The briefing note provides an overview of Welsh medium childcare provision, and includes a number of recommendations regarding the implementation of the 30 hours free childcare offer.

Recently, the Committee have been listening to evidence on the Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill. Due to the technical nature of the Bill, which focuses on administrative aspects of the 30 hours offer, and also in light of having already shared our briefing note, we decided against providing further evidence during the 1st stage of the Bill. Nonetheless, it has become evident that the Committee have been discussing much broader issues concerning the childcare offer during the evidence sessions. Many issues which were discussed in detail in the briefing note have been touched upon during these sessions (in particular during the session on the 14th of June). In this context, we would encourage the Committee to further consider the content of our briefing note when drafting their 1st stage report on the Bill.

Furthermore, in listening to the evidence provided so far, we have some doubts regarding some of the figures that have been alluded to when estimating the number of children who might be eligible for the offer. We have included a more detailed overview of these concerns in an attachment at the end of this letter, and these can be considered alongside the briefing note.

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Yours sincerely

Meri Huws

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Welsh Language Commissioner



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Attachment 1: The number of children eligible for the 30 hours free childcare offer

On page 13 of our briefing note, we refer to some of the statistics that were originally published by the Government's Social Research unit on 'Childcare capacity in Wales' regarding the number of 3-4 year old children who would be eligible for the 30 hours offer. We have some concerns regarding the accuracy of these figures.

According to this report there are 70,000 3-4 year old children in Wales. It seems this figure derives from mid-year population statistics. This figure is then used to calculate how many children are eligible for the offer in light of the 'working parents' constraint. The report suggests that roughly 46,000 of these 3-4 year olds would be eligible. This figure is similar to the figure quoted in the paper that was presented to the Committee on the 18th of April, which was 'roughly 40,000'. These figures have repeatedly been used as the basis upon which to scrutinise the Bill during the evidence sessions, and they were especially prominent in the evidence provided by Social Care Wales regarding the potential workforce implications of the offer. As far as we're aware, they are also the figures used by the Welsh Government to estimate the cost of the childcare offer in the first place.

Whilst there are 70,000 3-4 year old children in Wales, some of these are already enrolled in reception classes in schools (as they had their 4th birthday before the 1st of September). It is possible that the current projections on the number of eligible children is overestimated, as too the estimated costs of the childcare offer. This has significant implications in terms of the arguments presented to the committee regarding making the childcare offer a universal one to all 3-4 year olds.

This is our understanding of the likely number of eligible children:

- According to StatsWales, there are roughly 35,000 children born each year in Wales, and this is roughly the size of a school year cohort.
- Children are eligible for the 30 hours offer at the start of the term following their 3rd birthday.
- The Welsh Government's statistics suggest that roughly 60% of children are eligible in light of the 'working parents' constraint.
- Based on the assumption that roughly 12,000 children are born during each school term (that is 35,000 divided by 3) and that 60% of these (roughly 7,000) are eligible, these are the projection for eligible children each school term from 2018 onwards:



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- **Autumn Term** – 21,000 (one full school year – those born between 2nd of September 2015 and 31st August 2016 – these will not start school until September 2019)
- **Spring Term** – 28,000 (one full school year + those who turned 3 during the autumn term 2018)
- **Summer Term** – 35,000 (one full school year + those who had turned 3 during the autumn term of spring term of 2018).