

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue:	For further information contact:
Hybrid – Committee room 4 Tŷ Hywel and video conference via Zoom	Naomi Stocks Committee Clerk
Meeting date: 23 October 2025	0300 200 6565
Meeting time: 09.00	SeneddChildren@senedd.wales

Hybrid

Public meeting

09.00

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.00

2 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from items 3 and 6 of the meeting

09.00

Private meeting

09.00 – 09.30

3 Routes into post-16 education and training – consideration of the draft report

09.00 – 09.30

(Pages 1 – 166)

Attached Documents:

Draft Report

Public meeting

09.30 – 11.30



Senedd Cymru
Welsh Parliament

4 Implementation of education reforms – evidence session

09.30 – 11.30

(Pages 167 – 231)

Lynne Neagle MS, Cabinet Secretary for Education

Hannah Wharf, Deputy Director, Support for Learners Division, Welsh Government

Louise Brown, Head of ALN Reform, Welsh Government

Lloyd Hopkin, Deputy Director, Curriculum and Assessment, Welsh Government

Attached Documents:

Research Brief

Welsh Government

5 Papers to note

11.30

5.1 Reviewing Committee Effectiveness in the Sixth

(Pages 232 – 236)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Chair's forum from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

5.2 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 237 – 238)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing from the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

5.3 Services for care experienced children: exploring radical reform

(Pages 239 – 250)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Minister for Children and Social Care

Private meeting

11.30 – 12.00

6 Implementation of education reforms – consideration of the evidence

11.30– 12.00

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Implementation of Education Reforms

Evidence paper for the Children, Young People and Education Committee

23/10/2025

Summary

This paper provides written evidence to the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee to inform the inquiry into the progress in Educational Reforms for Additional Learning Needs and the Curriculum for Wales.

Contents

1. Additional Learning Needs	3
Funding and infrastructure.....	3
Support to the sector.....	3
Oversight and accountability.....	4
ALN legislative review.....	5
2. Curriculum for Wales	6
Support for schools and settings.....	6
Literacy and numeracy.....	7
Curriculum and assessment design.....	7
Qualifications.....	8
Evaluation of progress.....	8
Next steps.....	9

1. Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The implementation phase of the ALN reforms concluded at the end of August 2025. The ALN system is now the sole statutory framework for supporting children and young people with ALN in Wales. In January 2025, there were 32,127 pupils with IDPs under the ALN system in maintained schools ([Pupil Level Annual School Census \(PLASC\)](#)).

These reforms represent one of the most significant changes to the education system in a generation, introducing new duties, new ways of working, and a cultural shift across pre and post 16 education and health. Delivering change on this scale has been challenging, and the commitment of practitioners, local authorities, and delivery partners in reaching this point deserves recognition.

Funding and Infrastructure

This year we increased the local government settlement by £262m in 2025-26, which recognises the powerful points that local authority partners and our schools have made around pressures to deliver upon the statutory responsibility for ALN and wider education provision.

The Welsh Government is investing heavily in ALN reform. Since 2020, over £150 million in additional revenue has been provided through the hypothecated Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) grant to support ALN implementation. We maintained the £10 million uplift in the 2025-26 budget, providing £32 million to local authorities this year.

Alongside this, over the past 5 years, the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme has invested more than £170 million of capital funding to improve facilities for learners with ALN. This includes investment in special schools, specialist resource bases and in mainstream to ensure local authorities can best meet the needs of learners. This is in addition to £80 million capital allocated directly to local authorities over the last four years (£20m per annum) to support smaller-scale improvements through our ALN Capital Grant, and a further £5 million announced for 2025-26 for FEI's. The Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme will continue to invest in ALN provision with a proposed £750 million of projects planned over the next nine years to expand specialist provision.

Support to the Sector

A refresh of Initial Teacher Education accreditation criteria has strengthened expectations around ALN. The national ALN professional learning pathway is available to all teachers

supporting learners with ALN, with a strategic focus on Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinators (ALNCos).

From September 2025, the new National Professional Learning and Leadership Body is established to provide a high-quality, nationally consistent approach to professional learning across Wales. It will support practitioners at every stage of their career, with a strong focus on literacy, numeracy, wellbeing, and inclusive education, including ALN.

The ALNCo role is key to ALN reform success. We are taking forward work to implement the recommendations of the Independent Welsh Pay Review Body related to ALNCo pay, including providing an extra £5m to invest in our ALNCo workforce last financial year.

We are strengthening national support for ALN by appointing professional advisers, who will drive quality and delivery improvements through the sharing of effective practice, sector collaboration, and the development of shared solutions to common challenges. Each adviser will bring specialist expertise in key areas such as Welsh language provision, multi-agency collaboration, post-16 education, early years, healthcare needs, and quality assurance. Together, they form a vital national support network that will drive the effective implementation of statutory reforms under the ALN Act and the outcomes and actions of the ALN legislative framework review. Through a professional, coordinated approach, these advisers will strengthen sector capacity and foster strong partnerships to improve consistency, quality, and impact across all settings.

Oversight and Accountability

We have strengthened national oversight of the ALN system to drive continuous improvement. A new ALN Delivery and Improvement Board has been established to provide strategic leadership and accountability, and the Cabinet Secretary for Education chaired its first meeting last month. We have also launched a consultation on proposed changes to the ALN data to support effective provision for learners and ensure local authorities and the Welsh Government have robust and timely information to underpin strategic planning, system oversight and accountability.

Please see attached link to live consultation. <https://www.gov.wales/data-monitor-additional-learning-needs-aln-system>

A comprehensive programme to monitor and evaluate the progress of ALN reforms has been in place over the course of the implementation period.

As part of the [Evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs system](#), in March the survey of practitioners and professionals was [published](#). The findings of a survey of parents and carers will be published 14 October.

Estyn have carried out two thematic reviews of the ALN system providing deep insights on what's going well, what needs to improve and wider system performance: [Review of the new Additional Learning Needs system - 2023](#), [Thematic report - The additional learning needs system - 2024](#).

Estyn find that the ALN system is beginning to deliver on our ambitions for improved educational experiences for learners with additional needs, particularly in settings where reform has been embraced with commitment and clarity. However, they found that implementation of ALN reform is inconsistent across Wales, with schools and local authorities interpreting legislation differently, leading to variable support for learners. This concurs with wider evidence and has been further explored through the Legislative Review.

[The Review of the Independent Living skills curriculum in FEI's](#) reflects and informs the Independent Living Skills (ILS) curricula and provides insights and recommendations on the ALN system in FEI's.

[The Welsh language Quinquennial Review](#) will review the sufficiency of Welsh ALP, to report in Autumn 2026.

ALN Legislative Review

In October 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Education made a [written statement](#) communicating her commitment to take action to improve implementation by initiating a legislative review.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education made a [Written Statement](#) to update the Senedd in July. Work has progressed in the meantime with partners to co-produce practical solutions focussed on her five priorities.

In October 2025, the Cabinet Secretary delivered an Oral Statement on the implementation of the ALN Reforms after careful consideration of all the evidence from the ALN Legislative review to inform the Welsh Government and system wide commitment to improve delivery. In October 2025, Welsh Government published a summary of findings from the ALN legislative review and the Evaluation of the ALN system: survey of parents and carers. Education Tribunal Wales (ETW) also shared a report, drawing on appeals and judicial experience which will be published on their website.

2. Curriculum for Wales

This September marks a significant milestone as the first cohort of Curriculum for Wales pupils begin Year 10, starting work towards new Made for Wales qualifications.

Our national-level data from personalised assessments, shows encouraging progress in attainment in reading and numeracy. English Reading, in particular is showing higher levels of attainment compared to 2022/23 across all year groups. Improvements are also evident in Welsh Reading and Procedural Numeracy.

Our latest [qualitative studies](#), published in July 2025 show that the Curriculum for Wales has prompted a significant and systematic change in classroom practice. In many cases, this included changes to pedagogical practice (for example using more innovative pedagogical approaches or tailoring pedagogical approaches to be more inclusive). Increased connections with local community and contexts also emerge as a common theme across the reports. There is a growing emphasis on learner voice to secure purposeful teaching and learning that is relevant to the needs and interests of learners. The studies also evidence a shift towards more formative assessments and holistic understanding of learner progress.

These evaluations also reflect ongoing challenges in aligning the Curriculum for Wales with 14-16 qualifications, and in developing effective collaboration between schools and settings. A consistent need for further or improved professional learning and guidance was reported, which highlights the need for our national professional learning programmes being developed further. Other concerns raised included capacity, funding and the risk of variability in curriculum realisation.

Support for schools and settings

We continue to see real progress with the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales.

This year, we have invested comprehensively in this vision, with a [£44 million support package](#) that includes £20 million specifically directed to literacy and numeracy over the next 3 years - the essential foundations for all learning. This is in addition to an extra £2.5 million this year to aid local authorities to support these crucial gateway skills. The grant package includes:

- £6.6 million for Maths and numeracy
- £13.2 million for literacy, including support for Welsh-medium

- £2 million for curriculum design
- £1.6 million for international languages
- £4.2 million for Relationships and Sexuality Education
- £1.8 million for science
- £1.4 million for digital skills and computer science
- £12 million for the National Music Service
- £780k to support non-maintained nursery settings to realise the curriculum.

For further detail on grants awarded, please see **Annex 1**.

Literacy and Numeracy

The literacy and numeracy grants form part of dedicated programmes of National Support. As well as the professional learning secured through these grants, the national support includes more granular detail for progression in literacy and maths and numeracy, providing more detailed age-related expectations. The first tranche of these are being released in maths and numeracy this half term and expectations for literacy will be published for testing with schools and settings later in the autumn term. Officials have worked closely with Estyn on the development of these, and the expectations will be linked with the Personalised Assessments, to provide further detailed information to schools. Responsibility for Professional Learning for Literacy and Numeracy will transfer to Dysgu over this financial year.

Our approach to literacy specifically addresses issues around phonics. Over the last year, we have clarified our position both through statutory guidance and in our updated toolkit on Hwb, which includes practical support and case studies for practitioners. This makes very clear the importance of a systematic approach to the teaching of phonics. Our national support builds on this. It provides professional learning on the systematic teaching of phonics and the effective selection of phonics packages, as well as enhancing approaches to phonics in Welsh. We are continuing to develop broader packages to help support practitioner understanding of speech, language and communication development to ensure a coherent national approach to effective literacy development.

We continue to review the Literacy and Numeracy Frameworks, as well as the Digital Competence Framework. In speaking to schools throughout this year, they have been clear

that what the profession wants most is practical support and professional learning. This includes the more detailed expectations discussed above which are being made available this term. To give schools time and space to use support, we are extending the review period of the cross curricular frameworks. This also ensures that changes to the frameworks can build on that learning. The intention is to develop a version for consultation for the end of the spring.

Literacy and numeracy are key enablers that support learners to access the wider curriculum. Through investing in professional learning in these areas, we are supporting learners to engage with the full breadth of the curriculum, including areas such as Science and Technology. The professional learning provided through the science grant builds upon the investments made in literacy and numeracy, ensuring practitioners have the disciplinary knowledge and confidence to provide high quality teaching and learning across the sciences.

Curriculum and Assessment Design

Following the Committee's interim report in July 2024, over 200 schools have taken part in our National Support programme, which is helping practitioners and leaders develop their curriculum and assessment arrangements with confidence. This year, we will be rolling this out to a further 600 schools and all Local Authority teams. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive with 100% of participants finding the programme clear and relevant as well as benefiting from working collaboratively with other schools. This is critical to ensuring consistency across schools. We have also developed a range of tools and templates to support schools in their curriculum and assessment design, producing a range of case studies to support schools and settings. This support is not only important in helping schools to design their curriculum but also to build accompanying assessment approaches that successfully evaluate learner progress and inform their next steps in learning.

Qualifications

Qualifications Wales have led a major programme of reform of national 14-16 qualifications. During this process they have balanced the need for the reformed qualifications to reflect the curriculum, while at the same time recognising the importance of qualifications for 16-year-old learners for their next steps in education or employment, and the associated need for these qualifications to have currency and portability beyond Wales. These new qualifications are supported by our guidance on 14-16 learning under Curriculum for Wales.

The first teaching of reformed wave 1 GCSEs started in September. The qualification specifications for the remaining, wave 2, GCSEs were published on September 30th, in readiness for first teaching from September 2026.

In preparing to deliver these new GCSEs, schools have been supported by more information, made available more frequently, and sooner than before. It is now standard practice for qualification specifications to be made available a year before first teaching, not just for GCSE qualifications in Wales, but for other qualifications in Wales and across the UK.

Supported by funding from Welsh Government, WJEC has developed a bespoke package of professional learning, guidance material and resources, to ensure practitioners are positioned to confidently teach the new qualifications. This included a comprehensive suite of online and face-to-face professional learning opportunities for teachers across Wales. Equivalent professional learning and resources will be made available to support the preparation for and delivery of wave 2 GCSEs during this academic year.

Evaluation of Progress

Our monitoring of learning and the curriculum will also ensure we have clarity about what is working through multiple approaches:

- A comprehensive formative evaluation gathering feedback from teachers, leaders, pupils and their families.
- [Personalised assessments](#) showing improvements in reading and numeracy attainment.
- International assessment through PISA, and the introduction of [TIMSS](#) and [PIRLS](#) to measure our progress globally. The PIRLS main study will take place in spring 2026, with the TIMSS main study taking place in spring 2027.
- Our ongoing work with the system including the Education Improvement Team that works closely with local authorities, and our Curriculum Policy group which gives teaching professionals an important voice in setting direction.

Estyn's inspection activity has found the majority of schools and non-maintained settings continue to develop and refine their vision for curriculum and teaching in line with the principles and aims of the curriculum.

Estyn have undertaken a thematic review into teaching the Curriculum for Wales focusing on how well primary, secondary and all age schools are implementing and embedding effective approaches to teaching in the context of the Curriculum for Wales. We welcome this report and its emphasis on high-quality teaching and learning.

Through this report we continue to see real progress with the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. It's clear that schools are moving forward with the curriculum and there's lots of innovative and effective practice being identified. Across the system, schools are increasingly recognising the value of high-quality peer collaboration in driving improvement. We do acknowledge there are still a minority of schools who have yet to develop or embed clear expectations for the quality of teaching. This highlights the importance of our Curriculum Design support currently being rolled out.

We are also very grateful for Estyn's recently published thematic report on the teaching of mathematics and numeracy, which again highlights the importance of our national support. There is evidence of strong and effective practice in Estyn's report and the professional learning we have put in place builds on that. The report also identifies variability in the quality of teaching and the need for greater focus on the importance of teachers' subject knowledge. The £6.6m we are investing in national support for maths is aimed at addressing these points through consistent professional learning to develop subject knowledge, especially for non-specialists and to develop pedagogical approaches.

Last term, the Education Improvement Team engaged directly with all Local Authorities and their school leader representatives to discuss key local improvement priorities, especially in relation to literacy. This intelligence and feedback from the sector continues to shape our national support.

Next Steps

Feedback from professionals made very clear the importance of consistent professional learning for literacy and numeracy above any additional or changed guidance. While we have prioritised this, work continues on reviewing and updating the cross curricular skills frameworks.

In line with the recommendations of Successful Futures, we are also scoping a cycle of ongoing review and refinement of the Curriculum Framework, which will commence after all learners in Wales are learning under the Curriculum for Wales after September next year.

ANNEX 1 - CYPE Evidence paper – Curriculum for Wales grant support programme

Grant recipient	Aim	Amount awarded (total)
University of Wales Trinity Saint David, in partnership with University of Glasgow: Design partnerships: creating learning for Wales	The project is aimed at practitioners in primary, secondary and special schools. It offers practitioners support to realise the Curriculum for Wales through a collaborative, evidence-informed approach. Key support includes co-constructing professional knowledge in curriculum design, progression and assessment; developing ‘knowledgeable others’ to build capacity within clusters; and creating ‘school narratives’ (case studies) to share effective practices. Participants will engage via design teams, workshops and school visits.	£2,025,141 provided until March 2028.
Stori Wales: Cwtch education project	The project is aimed at practitioners and leaders in primary and secondary schools. The project supports the development of a whole-school approach that enables learners to form and maintain healthy, respectful relationships based on mutual trust and empathy. The funding ensures funding for 22 advisors covering all LA areas. National advisory support focusses on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivering consistent, confident, and measurable relationships and sexuality education (RSE), equipping practitioners with cross-curricular knowledge and understanding needed to embed it effectively • enhancing RSE understanding among governors, parents and carers – clarifying its content, methodology and positive impact on learners • ensuring learner voice remains central to curriculum development and implementation 	£4,219,563 until March 2028.
The Learning Partnership (Wales) Ltd. Primed for success Cluster level transition arrangements	The project is aimed at leaders of mathematics in primary and secondary schools, and practitioners working with Year 6 and 7 learners in schools through secondary and feeder primary school cluster working. With a focus on mathematics and numeracy, the project is an ambitious professional learning opportunity. Through a mix of expert input, regular facilitation and cluster inquiry, participants explore the teaching and learning of the 5 mathematical proficiencies:	£2,711,897 until March 2028.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conceptual understanding • communication using symbols • fluency • logical reasoning • strategic competence <p>The aim is that learners experience a smooth transition in their mathematical learning between primary and secondary schools.</p>	
National Numeracy: Building number confident school communities in Wales	<p>The project is aimed at primary school leaders, practitioners, parents and carers. It aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transform attitudes towards numeracy in primary schools • increase learner confidence with numbers • improve positive feelings about mathematics • highlight the value of mathematics outside the classroom <p>Support will also boost the confidence of parents, carers and school staff in supporting mathematics learning. This includes professional learning, accredited Numeracy Champions training, alongside access to interactive online sessions called 'Feeling Better About Maths' which focus on improving adults' confidence and attitudes towards mathematics.</p>	£290,595 until March 2028.
Swansea University: Maths Support Programme Wales (MSPW)	<p>The project is aimed at primary, secondary and post-16 practitioners and school leaders. The focus is on learner progression in mathematics from primary, through secondary and into post-16 GCE AS or A2 further mathematics qualifications. This is supported through professional learning, in-school capacity building, resources and direct support. Professional learning is available for non-specialist and specialist mathematics practitioners looking to enhance their practice, as well as mathematics leadership. Support promotes a broad appreciation and enjoyment of mathematics, emphasising accessibility and relevance to all learners from primary school upwards.</p>	£1,645,771 March 2028
The Learning Partnership Wales Ltd Primed for Succes (Primary)	<p>This project supports Wales' mission to achieve high standards and aspirations for all primary aged learners, realising the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales through mathematics.</p>	£2m Until March 2028

<p>Pedagogy and Progression in the Primary Phase</p>	<p>It focuses on improving the teaching and learning of the 5 mathematical proficiencies across all primary year groups. It helps learners develop a deeper understanding of key mathematical concepts, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic theories in mathematical education • essential competencies • elements of an effective mathematics lesson. <p>It also promotes high-level mathematical thinking and encourages learners to apply their understanding in problem-solving situations.</p>	
<p>Books Council of Wales: Love Reading Cymru, Cyngor Llyfrau Cymru</p>	<p>The project is aimed at practitioners and learners in the non-maintained sector, primary and secondary schools, parents, carers and libraries. It is a 3-year multi-strand programme to support reading for pleasure in Welsh and English. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • primary and secondary workshops for equipping practitioners with integrated reading strategies and contemporary books • book reading and discussion competitions for Year 3 to Year 8 learners and associated activities • a campaign to support parents, carers and families on reading for pleasure at home • the Summer Reading Challenge to keep learners reading through the holidays 	<p>£849,860 March 2028</p>
<p>Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University: Cymraeg PALS-UK</p>	<p>The project is aimed at primary school practitioners and leaders. Peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) is an internationally recognised class-wide peer tutoring intervention for learners working towards Progression step 3 that aims to improve reading comprehension and oral reading fluency. An Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) evaluation reported learners in the PALS condition made 2 months additional progress in their reading. The project will prepare PALS for the Welsh educational context through a co-construction approach to ensure alignment with the Curriculum for Wales framework guidance and Welsh language requirements.</p>	<p>£99,637 until March 2026</p>

<p>CYDAG: Rhaglen Hyfforddiant ‘Dysgu Darllen a Darllen i Ddysgu’, ‘Learn to Read’ and ‘Read to Learn’ training programme</p>	<p>The project is aimed at nursery and primary school practitioners and leaders. It entails a national training programme in Welsh language phonics for practitioners and teaching assistants working with learners aged 3 to 7. The support includes guidelines for practitioner self-assessment of the implementation of Welsh language phonics reading programmes, alongside facilitating peer-to-peer working to reflect on experiences and successes, discuss challenges and share practice in developing reading skills. The project will also develop and deliver follow-on training moving from ‘Learning to Read’ to ‘Reading to Learn’.</p>	<p>£224,000 until March 2028</p>
<p>Bangor University working in partnership Wrexham University: Ein Llais Ni: Ddyfnhau, gwreiddio ac ehangu</p>	<p>The project is aimed at practitioners in primary, secondary and special schools. It provides a support system for leaders and practitioners across school sectors to use the Ein Llais Ni programme, focussing on developing pedagogy and providing practical guidance for all practitioners and leaders to enhance Welsh language oracy.</p> <p>The project will promote digital methods to inspire, facilitate development and record learner progress. It will effectively promote collaboration among practitioners and schools by sharing effective practices and developing a shared understanding of progression.</p>	<p>£761,291 until March 2028</p>
<p>Bangor University: CAL:ON Cymru</p>	<p>CAL:ON Cymru is a national centre of excellence for literacy in English and Welsh. It unites leading literacy expertise from Bangor University and the University of York with OxEd & Assessment, Swansea University, UCL and BookTrust Cymru. It is designed to transform literacy outcomes across Wales, presenting a coherent, evidence-based strategy in partnership with all 22 local authorities.</p> <p>CAL:ON Cymru delivers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new bilingual professional learning modules, including phonics and reading fluency, alongside national guidance aligned with the Curriculum for Wales, which will also be embedded in initial teacher education and co-developed with educators • effective, bilingual whole-class literacy programmes and interventions for learners aged 3 to 16 	<p>£8,211,320 until March 2028</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new bilingual, co-designed assessment tools at key transition points for learners at risk of falling behind 	
Cardiff University: Multilingual mentoring project	The project provides support for primary and secondary practitioners to integrate multilingual teaching into their curriculum, enhancing confidence and competence in delivering literacy-enhancing multilingual learning experiences. This includes mentoring to secondary learners, alongside professional learning, and teaching and learning resources to be used in primary and secondary schools. Webinars, guidance videos and in-person workshops help practitioners integrate multilingual teaching methods, with confidence and creativity.	£1,229,400 until March 2028
e-sgol: Yr e-sgol laith	<p>The project supports the priority of literacy, international languages. It will enhance language education in primary and all-age schools across Wales by engaging practitioners and learners in interactive language lessons. It will provide professional learning for practitioners and direct teaching experiences for learners, aligning with the Curriculum for Wales. The aims are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> upskill practitioners improve learner engagement in language learning foster a consistent approach to international language taster sessions in primary schools <p>A central language practitioner will design and deliver lessons in international languages and British Sign Language (BSL) during the academic year.</p>	£298,166 until March 2028
Stephen Spender Trust: Literature fires the imagination	The project provides international languages support including 2 professional learning programmes each delivered across 3 virtual sessions. It will design tools for primary and secondary practitioners to support participation and integration of 'creative translation' techniques into classroom teaching. Adaptable tools will cover French, German, Spanish, Mandarin and 4 home or heritage languages including unique audio-visual material. A virtual practitioner network supports ongoing development of practice.	£55,950 until March 2028
Arts Council for Wales: Creative Learning Cymru	The project is aimed at practitioners, assistants and leaders in primary and secondary schools. It fosters creativity in learners, practitioners, assistants and leaders across the	£3,000,000 until March 2028

	<p>curriculum. It helps improve literacy and oracy through innovative, evidence-based approaches, while enhancing learner engagement and well-being. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bespoke 'creative schools' support • professional learning tailored to school needs • a fund to support visits to cultural venues and activities, allowing learners to develop communication skills through music, drama, dance, art, film and digital media 	
<p>Institute of Physics: Boosting science education</p>	<p>The project is aimed at primary and secondary school practitioners, technicians and school leaders. It provides a significant programme of support to enhance science teaching and learning outcomes in primary and secondary schools delivered in partnership by the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society of Chemistry and Science Made Simple. It will strengthen practitioners' pedagogical and subject knowledge, as well as build confidence through professional development and specialised mentoring and coaching. Practitioners and technicians will benefit from tailored teaching resources and online modules, alongside the creation of networks to foster peer support.</p>	<p>£1,845,545 until March 2028</p>
<p>STEM Learning: Teaching digital with confidence</p>	<p>The project will support primary and secondary practitioners to build confidence and capability in delivering computing and digital skills. It delivers 20 new professional learning courses, covering topics such as artificial intelligence, cyber security, coding and computational thinking. These courses will be delivered online with live facilitation, alongside face-to-face sessions in priority areas or where hands-on learning is most effective.</p> <p>The project includes bilingual resources that will help practitioners understand how the content links to progression within the Curriculum for Wales. It provides advisory support to schools in applying curriculum requirements in practice, leading online and in-person practitioner networks in north, mid and west Wales (complementing similar support already available in central south and southeast Wales). These networks, along with a dedicated online community space, build sustainable professional learning communities. The project also encourages and supports school engagement with the UK government-funded STEM Ambassadors programme to enrich classroom activity.</p>	<p>£1,400,000 until March 2028</p>

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) Cymru working with Cwlwm partners.	The project supports the non-maintained nursery sector in Wales to enhance quality practice in nursery education and ensure continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales. This includes advice, support, professional learning and resources to enhance curriculum implementation. Support improves quality practice in nursery education and ensures continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales framework.	£184,000 until March 2028
Early Years Wales, working with Cwlwm partners.	The project supports the non-maintained nursery sector in Wales to enhance quality practice in nursery education and ensure continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales. This includes advice, support, professional learning and resources to enhance curriculum implementation. Support improves quality practice in nursery education and ensures continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales framework.	£184,000 until March 2028
Coram PACEY Cymru, working with Cwlwm partners	The project supports the non-maintained nursery sector in Wales to enhance quality practice in nursery education and ensure continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales. This includes advice, support, professional learning and resources to enhance curriculum implementation. Support improves quality practice in nursery education and ensures continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales framework.	£184,000 until March 2028
Mudiad Meithrin, working with Cwlwm partners	The project supports the non-maintained nursery sector in Wales to enhance quality practice in nursery education and ensure continued alignment with the Curriculum for Wales. Support improves practice in nursery education, provides guidance on developmentally appropriate pedagogy and ensures alignment with the Curriculum for Wales framework. Working with Cwlwm, the support includes high-quality, bilingual resources and professional learning for funded and non-funded, non-maintained Cwlwm settings and practitioners offering a local, national and international context.	£596,000 until March 2028

Elin Jones MS

Chair

Chairs' Forum

06 October 2025

Consultation: Reviewing Committee Effectiveness in the Sixth Senedd

Dear Elin,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 July seeking our views on committee operations in the sixth Senedd. We considered the consultation questions at our meeting on 17 September. Annex 1 outlines our responses to these questions.

I look forward to further discussions about these issues in Chairs' Forum and more widely across the Senedd, as preparations are made for the seventh Senedd.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Annex A: Consultation response

Committee culture

The Forum would like to know your view on how committees focus their time e.g legislation, policy inquiries, stakeholder engagement, consideration of petitions, and the level of strategic focus and evaluation in Committees.

We believe we have managed to balance the various competing calls on our time effectively. We have scrutinised three Bills, two of which went through the full legislative process, and one that fell following Stage 1 consideration. This has been manageable because we did not have to deal with curtailed timetables, and had sufficient notice to enable us to plan our forward work programme accordingly. We have had a small number of LCMs during that time, which we are aware is far fewer than other committees. This has meant we have been able to balance our various responsibilities in such a way that we could deliver on our aims and objectives set out in our strategic plan.

At the outset of this Senedd we developed a strategic plan (Full and Simple). Following the significant turnover of committee membership in 2024, we revisited this plan and decided that it was still appropriate and relevant.

As can be seen in our plan, a key commitment is to put the voices of children and young people at the heart of all our work.

We have done this by going out and talking to children, young people, and their families where they live. We have supplemented these visits and other engagement activity with stakeholder events held in the Senedd. Such events provide a more informal opportunity for either children and young people (as in our work on children and young people in care) or professionals (for work such as children and young people on the margins; routes into post 16 education and training; or school improvement and learner attainment) to talk to us on the Senedd estate.

We have endeavoured to ensure that these experiences and opinions meaningfully impact our decision making and recommendations. It is important that committees in the next Senedd continue to identify ways of working which enable the voices of those most affected by a particular issue to be at the forefront of their work.

More generally, we have found that having regular conversations within committee about our long-term forward work programme has helped us to juggle our workload in the most efficient way. Having good and open lines of communication with the Welsh Government is particularly helpful for managing our work programme.

We do sometimes struggle with the length of meeting papers, and think more consideration should be given to try and reduce this. Obviously, this should not be done in such a way that it impedes a committee to do its job effectively.

The Forum would like to know whether you have a view on the tone and dynamics of the committee meetings and on the role played by the Chair.

We think it is important that committee Chairs are inclusive, ensuring that all Members, witnesses and others contributing to business have the opportunity to speak. Our current Chair has always done this throughout her tenure.

The Chair indicated that her preference was to try and ensure that formal proceedings were as informal as possible, in order to put witnesses at ease. This, she believes, enables anyone participating to give the best account of themselves.

Organisation of committee business

The Forum would welcome views on the effectiveness of policy and legislation scrutiny being led by single committees, and whether committee remits should be cross-cutting or mirror Ministerial portfolios.

We reflected on our recent experience of scrutinising the then Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill. Due to the cross-cutting nature of the Bill, we formally invited members of the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee to participate in our Stage 1 scrutiny under SO 17.49. Two of their Members joined us for all aspects of our Stage 1 scrutiny. We believe this really enriched our scrutiny. We think that the current model where one policy committee is the “lead” committee for scrutiny of a Bill should continue, with this model enabling other committees to be involved.

We think that even with an increase of Members, having separate Bill committees would be a challenge. We also believe that the current model helps develop expertise which enables us to draw critical links between legislation, policy and financial scrutiny. For example, our current inquiry into teacher recruitment and retention directly flowed from our work on the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill.

Earlier on in this term, following our scrutiny of the then Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, we decided to look at mental health support in higher education.

Both these policy inquiries were important, but might not have been undertaken without the issues being highlighted through the legislative scrutiny.

The Forum would welcome views on how committees are constituted such as the size of committees, the membership, and the way in which Committee Chairs and membership is allocated.

There were a range of views about the optimum number of members on a committee. However, we are in agreement that having more members would be beneficial. We are aware that for committees with smaller memberships, there can be real issues with quorum. However, the benefits of more Members goes beyond issues of quorum. Larger committees ensure a wider range of perspectives and views informing committee work. Broadly speaking, we think committees should have eight members.

We all agree that one of the biggest issues is when Members sit on multiple committees. We think this should be avoided as much as possible.

Having committee Chairs elected by the whole Senedd is a real strength of the committee system. It helps support cross-party and consensual working, which is an important feature of effective scrutiny committees.

In our discussions on the importance of elected Chairs, a suggestion was made that in addition to an election at the start of the Senedd, there could be a re-election mid-way through a Senedd term. This could provide opportunities for those who may not be in a position to stand for such a position at the outset of a Senedd term (for example someone who is newly elected). This would also help ensure that chairs had to maintain confidence of the whole Senedd throughout the term, and not just at the outset. Such re-elections would be open to any Senedd member from the political group to which the Chair was allocated to stand against the existing Chair, and the vote would be of the whole Senedd not just of the individual committee.

Interactions with Committees

The Forum would like to hear views on your experiences of attending and interacting with committees, including matters such as working in a hybrid way and the ability to engage with the work of the Senedd in your language of choice.

The flexibility that hybrid proceedings provide is very important, both for Members and those who are giving evidence or engaging with committee business in other ways. However, we all agree that when people are coming to give evidence in person, Members should make the effort to also be in person unless there are exceptional circumstances.

We would highlight that both of our Stage 2 proceedings were held as fully in-person meetings.

The Forum would also welcome examples of committee scrutiny of work which you consider has been effective or was not as effective and any suggestions for how effectiveness could be improved.

As highlighted above, we have prioritised speaking to people with direct experiences of the issues we are considering. As part of this, we have found stakeholder events particularly effective. We bring together a range of people, usually professionals but not always, to discuss issues in private and under Chatham House rules. We have found this has enabled more people with “on the ground” experience to share their insights, and can often result in more candid evidence than in public session. We have published unattributed, summary reports of our stakeholder events, which can then be drawn on when preparing reports, conclusions and recommendations. It therefore strikes a balance between getting the evidence we need with and being as transparent as much as possible. We have been able to offer these as hybrid events, enabling participants to take part in a format that works best for them.

Sarah Murphy MS
Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing

13 October 2025

Perinatal mental health support

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for ~~your letter~~ dated 18 September responding to ~~our recent letter~~ expressing our concerns and those of a wide range of third sector organisations about the disbanding of the Perinatal Clinical Implementation Network, and the National Clinical Lead, and replacement with a Community of Practice / Peer Group. We considered this letter at our meeting on 8 October, and agreed to write to seek some further clarity.

In our original letter, we asked five specific questions, which, for ease of reference, I repeat below:

1. We note that this [the disbanding of the Network and Lead] is currently a "proposal". Please can you confirm the status of these proposals, and whether considering is being given to retain the Network and the Clinical Lead Role?
2. What are the reasons for the proposal, and what other options have been explored?
3. Can you also explain why there has not been wider consultation and engagement on the proposals themselves, and clarify whether this will be rectified?
4. If the Network is disbanded, how does the Welsh Government intend to ensure that the inequities which are currently present in the system are reduced and ultimately removed?
5. We would also appreciate an update on when the Mother and Baby Unit in Chester will be open to Welsh families, along with confirmation of the long term status of Uned Gobaith? Finally, when the recommendations from the one year review of Uned Gobaith will be implemented.

Your letter did not make specific reference to the questions we asked, although some of the information did cover some of these areas. For clarity and transparency, we would appreciate if you could reply providing specific responses to each of the questions above.

In particular, we note that your letter did not:

- provide specific reasons for the change in approach, or detail any alternative options which may have been considered;
- outline what consultation or engagement was undertaken on the change in approach;
- provide specific details on how you will ensure that the current inequities are reduced and removed, and provided general performance and assurance measures instead; or
- provide an update on when the recommendations from the one year review of Uned Gobaith will be implemented.

As we note in our original letter, we share the significant concerns of stakeholders about these developments, and that they will impact on families accessing the perinatal mental health support that they need.

Yours sincerely,



Buffy Williams MS

Chair

Children, Young People and Education Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/DB/2526/25

Buffy Williams AS/MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee
Welsh Parliament

16 October 2025

Dear Buffy,

I know you have taken a keen interest in developments around the Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDAC) Model, so I am writing to share the FDAC Working Group Discussion Paper presented to the Family Justice Network on 22nd September.

FDAC Working Group

The Working Group was established following publication in June 2024 of the Evaluation of the Cardiff and Vale pilot, to consider whether a further roll out of FDAC would be in scope across Wales. The Working Group was formed by the Family Justice Network and included representation from key stakeholders including Cafcass Cymru, health, children's services and Welsh Government policy leads (Family Justice and Substance Misuse). The Group heard from organisations such as Centre for Justice Innovation and the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory who have an in-depth knowledge of this model.

The Group presented its Discussion Paper to the Family Justice Network with initial findings and recommendations, recognising the FDAC model as effective and beneficial for children and families, with wide support for embedding a problem-solving approach in public law proceedings. However, members identified several challenges to national roll-out, including:

- Inconsistent service availability across Wales
- Geographic barriers, particularly in rural areas
- Financial constraints at multiple levels

The Group emphasised that FDAC should not be progressed in isolation but must be viewed within the wider system, including:

- The Multi-Agency Practice Framework
- The Pathfinder approach in private law
- The broader landscape of early intervention and prevention, edge of care services and post-court support services.

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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.

Next Steps

The Family Justice Network endorsed the paper and proposed two Task and Finish groups should be established under oversight of the Working Group, with the aim of reporting in the first year of the next Senedd term, to:

- Map and assess existing edge-of-care service provision and opportunities for development; and
- Consider system and judicial design issues needed to support a public law problem-solving approach.

I am copying this letter to Mike Hedges MS, Chair of the Legislation and Justice Committee, and I will continue to keep you informed as this work progresses.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care

FDAC WORKING GROUP DISCUSSION PAPER

This paper provides an update on the work undertaken by the Family Drug and Alcohol Courts (FDACs) Working Group following publication of the FDAC evaluation; outlining next steps to implement positive changes in public law with an overarching goal of reducing the number of children looked after in Wales. Five FDAC Working Group meetings have taken place, and this paper sets out the key recommendations arising from the evidence taken.

BACKGROUND

FDACs are a specialist alternative to standard care proceedings for cases where parental drug and/or alcohol use is an issue. FDACs adopt a problem-solving, therapeutic approach which is focussed on addressing the underlying issues affecting parenting capacity. The FDAC model relies upon multi-disciplinary support and specialist training for judges.

FDACs, initially piloted in London in (2008-2012), are based on an American model and have since expanded to other areas in England. In Wales we sought similar results through the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS), initially piloted in 2010 with a national roll out from 2014 before becoming a statutory requirement through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and funding going into the Revenue Support Grant. The aim of IFSS is to support families intensively with challenges related to parental substance misuse, and other co-existing issues such as domestic abuse and mental health concerns. However, the key difference is IFSS is not directly linked to public law proceedings while the court is intrinsically linked to the FDAC model. An additional issue for consideration is the fact that IFSS services have developed and evolved differently across local authority and health board regions in Wales.

In 2019 The Commission on Justice in Wales Report recommended Wales embed the FDAC model within their Family Courts. The Welsh Government supported piloting an FDAC Court in Wales, and in 2020 provided funding to the Centre for Justice Innovation to develop a pilot model. The South-East Wales Local Family Justice Board was selected to host the pilot, which began hearing cases in November 2021 at Cardiff Family Court. The pilot FDAC supported families referred by both Cardiff and the Vale's Children's Services.

An interim evaluation of the pilot was published by CASCADE in 2022 which noted the pilot had launched successfully, despite COVID-19 disruptions. Following the conclusion of the pilot a subsequent full evaluation report was published by CASCADE in July 2024 with 5 key recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Progress with plans to scale FDAC further in Wales, and commission an evaluation of impact and cost effectiveness.

Recommendation 2: Increase training opportunities for all stakeholders interacting with FDAC and offer follow-up training for professionals after they begin working with families in FDAC proceedings.

Recommendation 3: Improve the quality and completeness of routinely collected data about FDAC and standard care proceedings.

Recommendation 4: Give further consideration to how outcomes other than reunification are defined and measured.

Recommendation 5: Increase the timescales for pilot set-up and implementation.

The findings were presented to members of the Family Justice Network (Wales) in November 2024, which recommended Welsh Government establish a Working Group to consider next steps.

THE WORKING GROUP

At the initial FDAC working group meeting membership consisted of Heads of Children's Services, Cafcass Cymru and officials from Family Justice Police, Welsh Government. Following this meeting the membership of the group expanded to include representatives from Health including the NHS Performance and Improvement and Consultant Midwives Cymru, and colleagues from Substance Misuse Policy, Welsh Government. In addition to the agreed membership guests who have presented to the working group include: Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, the Centre for Justice Innovation (CJI) and Swansea Children's Services

The five aims of the group were discussed and agreed at the initial meeting. These aims were included in the Terms of Reference and will be responded to throughout this paper.

RESPONSE TO THE AIMS OF THE GROUP

- 1. To analyse and make recommendations on the potential scalability of the FDAC model in Wales; including consideration of whether FDAC could effectively work in all areas Wales including sufficiency of cases, travel and access to alcohol and substance misuse services.***

FDAC is an evidence-based model, with data to support better outcomes for children and financial savings. CJI reports that 52% of children are reunified with their parent(s) or main care givers compared to 27% in standard Care Proceedings. To support economic analysis CJI has developed a Cost Benefit Tool and they report FDAC costs £18,000 per case and produces an average direct benefit saving per

case of £74,068¹. The CJI business case that supported the initial pilot in Cardiff and the Vale projected £1.2million in savings per 30 cases.

The working group met with CJI and considered the differing needs across Wales and the transferability of the model in relation to accessibility to vital services for families and the courts. The group learnt the FDAC model is adaptable and could work in areas with different demographics, but the location could pose challenges. For example, as referenced above in relation to how IFSS services have evolved, residents in more rural parts of Wales may not have the same access to services, such as substance misuse services, which could affect their ability to engage.

Regular drug testing and support from substance misuse services is a key aspect of the FDAC model so access to these services is essential to secure engagement. Information from the National Rural Crime Network's 2019 report, *Captive and Controlled* noted that those living in rural areas are likely to remain in relationships containing domestic abuse for 25% longer than those living in more urban areas, one of the reasons for this has been scarcity of services and a lack of visibility where services are available. Geographical isolation is recorded to be a barrier to accessing support.

Therefore, it will be necessary for each local area to consider how their services could meet the demands and respond to the intensive support required to families in their area accessing FDAC at any given time, particularly substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health services. This will require a multi-agency approach and shared commitment to invest in the system changes required to enable an FDAC model to work effectively.

Further to this there have been Court closures across Wales in recent years and this can impact the accessibility of Family Courts in Wales. In more rural areas, particularly if parents do not have their own transport, public transport may be difficult to navigate if there is not a court nearby. The FDAC model requires frequent visits to the Family Court and accessibility to Court must be considered. To resolve this there may be a need to adapt to use the CVS (Court Virtual System) which will impact on the ability of the Judge and families to build relationships, or hold court meetings out of the central Court in the region, which will not only be dependent on the availability of the Judge but will also need to align with any other demands from the Court such as the impact on judiciary support staff. The use of CVS has been considered by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory who found that 88% of parents and relatives reported concerns with the handling of cases virtually with 66% feeling that their case had not been dealt with well. Further findings included families feeling there was less empathy and there were further worries in the event of difficult meetings as parents could be left unsupported. This reinforces the concerns around how relationships would be built in these situations as the establishment of professional relationships is key to success with an FDAC model. If the decision is to expand FDAC, it will be necessary to explore accessibility to court meetings in more detail with the judiciary, HMCTS, parents and supporting professionals.

¹ *FDAC: The Case for Investment* (July 2024)

Outcome: the FDAC model itself is flexible and can be adapted to different area needs but more detailed mapping of local provision, and commitment from all agencies involved through a multi-agency approach, will be needed to ensure there are sufficient support services and structures in all areas to support a national approach to FDAC. Alongside this there will be a need for all services to commit to the ongoing support to the FDAC model so families have access to the support needed when they need it without having barriers such as waiting lists and transport preventing them from being immersed in the model.

2. To examine and advise on the potential funding implications and sustainability of any future extension/roll out of FDAC in Wales and how partnership funding arrangements including local authorities and local health boards would work if there was further development of FDACs.

The initial amount of funding provided by the Welsh Government for a 2 year FDAC pilot was £450,000, this was for one FDAC; to upscale this across Wales there would need to be a considerable amount of financial support available circa 3-4m. The working group met with CJI who advise that sustainable funding was one of the main issues faced by FDACs, and some established FDACs have failed despite a positive start up as LAs have been unable to find financially viable ways to continue funding FDAC.

CJI advised funding agreements between parties must be agreed at the outset. They note the average cost per FDAC case is £18,000 which includes the costs of a fully functioning FDAC team to work with the family and any additional costs relating to the case such as drug testing, drug and alcohol support, travel costs etc. However, this significant investment is repaid as CJI estimates for every £1 spent on FDAC £3.20 of net savings are returned to the tax-payer annually. Despite this, as with many preventative services, the benefits do not always return to the investor making it harder for services to commit to.

The many benefits of FDAC seen by the judiciary, Children's Services and families can also be of benefit to Local Health Boards. Successful engagement with FDACs would likely result in reduced long-term health service demand. Parents who participate in the FDAC process receive structured and coordinated access to treatment for drug and alcohol dependency and also mental health support. This support in turn reduces the need for repeat crisis interventions and any associated physical and mental health costs relating to addiction.

In the event that FDAC were to be rolled out nationally, the linking up of support from drug and alcohol services, LHB, Local Authorities and the Judiciary will be pivotal and will require ongoing commitment to continue to support and invest in the model.

Outcome: A significant amount of funding will be required to roll out FDAC nationally to support a limited number of families. Whilst there are identified cost-benefits in the longer term; agreements must be in place at the outset to ensure funding is sustainable. Given the high set up costs of FDAC and the current pressures for Local Authorities and Local Health Boards ensuring that they are properly resourced will be necessary with clear plans for how LAs and LHBs will be able to commit to ongoing running costs after the initial set up. The Group recommends local authorities and partners review current structures and services to identify what expertise and intensive support services currently operate in their authorities and the potential for adapting what is in place so minimum set up costs are necessary. In addition, partners should consider working together on common elements such as workforce requirements.

3. To consider and advise on whether there should be further investment in FDACs or if further funding should focus on augmenting existing or other services.

The working group had the benefit of hearing from a successful multidisciplinary project, Jig-So, established by Swansea Children's Services in partnership with Swansea Bay LHB. This project demonstrates the benefits of working collaboratively to meet the needs of the service user group. This project is evidence based and the data relating to Jig-So shows a reduction in numbers of children becoming looked after following parental engagement with the service.

The working group is aware of other projects across Wales that have similar joint working arrangements that benefit children and families in Wales such as Step-Up Step-Down in Powys and Pembrokeshire which incorporates strong joint working to either support children and young people to remain at home or help them to return home safely.

Further to this, there are also regional arrangements for Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) to support families on a regional basis with parental drug and alcohol misuse, and in some regions the support extends to other support needs such as domestic abuse and neglect. Like FDAC there is early evidence that supports IFSS, the Evaluation of the Integrated Family Support Service: Final Report (2014) notes that the families involved "achieved broadly positive trajectories". The Commission for Justice in Wales report, 2019 acknowledges that IFST (Integrated Family Support Teams) are seen as examples of successful multi-agency delivery which led to better relationships within families and was valued by the families themselves. In view of the passage of time since this service was first established the working group note that the consistency of approach with IFSS has changed, with different regions delivering the service in different ways. More detailed exploration of the current status of IFSS in every region will help form a clearer picture of the landscape across Wales.

Services that can provide further support around families in Wales who may be more likely to come into contact with court proceedings include Reflect, Project Unity and Parental Advocacy Services. Reflect has been praised as a respectful, supportive

service offering support to parents whose children have been removed with an aim of avoiding repeat removals. In the same vein, Project Unity provides support to expectant mothers who are care experienced helping to increase the likelihood of the child remaining with their mother upon birth and changing past patterns.

Further to the support that Reflect and Project Unity can offer to change past patterns and improve future outcomes, the Welsh Government has shown a commitment to Parental Advocacy with services now being available nationally. Parental advocacy can help foster positive engagement from parents and encourage empowerment, thus helping to ensure that parents are engaged in the work with Children's Services. Funding for Reflect has been integrated into local authority core funding, but Project Unity and Parental Advocacy are currently grant funded by Welsh Government.

Whilst extending the scope of FDAC is one option to support families, another could be to revisit existing services across the whole spectrum of support from early intervention through to intensive support during and after proceedings and consider whether these support services are appropriately meeting the needs of children and families. Additionally, the opportunity to share learning from proven working projects like Jig-So could mean that good practice may be emulated in other parts of Wales.

Outcome: There are merits to funding a roll out of FDAC if budget is available, but there are also concerns that the significant costs of starting up an FDAC may be better spent bolstering existing support services and structures and ensuring they are well coordinated to work together and support families in a similar way to the FDAC. The considerable investment in IFSS initially demonstrates the importance of strengthening preventative services and diverting cases away from care proceedings where possible, promoting this style of support could garner further positive outcomes for children and families.

IFSS has been in place nationally since 2014 officials recommend that this service be revisited before another very similar service is established through FDAC. The most recent evaluation of the services was from some years ago; therefore it would be of benefit to consider how these services are now functioning and whether the funding provided for these services is being used to its full advantage or whether changes are necessary.

The FDAC highlights the importance of family support working alongside families intensively, and the commitment from parents to work with these services, which is taken account of during proceedings. We need a consistent offer of services working alongside families before, during and after court to support children to remain living with their families where this is possible. To ascertain what services are available across Wales, it would be useful for a working group to be established to undertake a deep dive into the current offer in Wales and explore how more consistency can be achieved before further commitments are made.

To maximise the number of families that can be supported, the working group considers that further investment in support services and the structures that surround

the Family Court both pre and post Care Proceedings would be beneficial as well as consideration to the status of IFSS across Wales. Following this, it will be necessary to consider how they can work with the Courts through a Problem-Solving approach as the FDAC has demonstrated is highly effective.

4. To explore and advise on how good practice identified in the FDAC pilot and Pathfinder can best be mainstreamed into the work of children's services in Wales and the family courts. This should include examination of how the problem-solving approach used in FDACs and Pathfinder could be used more widely across family courts in Wales and how it could be embedded in other/all family proceedings.

While private law proceedings have seen progress through the national implementation of the Pathfinder model (a problem-solving, therapeutic approach) public law remains rooted in traditional, adversarial methods which can be daunting and disempowering. Families often enter proceedings feeling they have already lost and without a voice in decisions about their children. The approach also reduces the likelihood of resolving proceedings with an agreed plan for the children which promotes reunification.

In addition to hearing about the work from Jig-So the working group also heard a presentation by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory about the work being undertaken around Born into Care. The work has identified a sharp increase in the numbers of newborn babies (under a week old) becoming subject to care proceedings over the last decade, many of these removals have involved urgent listings. Whilst this itself is a piece of work that the Public Law Working Group (PLWG) are already looking at, it is important to note that as explored by Nuffield, children under 1 are significantly more likely to become subject to Care Proceedings than older children. In line with this, Blackpool are currently piloting a "baby court" which seeks to work similarly to FDAC as a Problem-Solving Court thus demonstrating that the FDAC approach lends itself to other areas of need. This project uses a problem-solving approach and collaboration of services to better support families with an aim of reducing the high numbers of babies entering into care in Blackpool. The representatives from the project explained that whilst some issues were relating to parental drug and alcohol use, often other issues were prevalent such as domestic abuse.

Pathfinder has now been rolled out nationally and it presents an opportunity to explore how the judicial time saved by Pathfinder could be recycled to support a problem-solving approach in general across care proceedings. There are merits to FDAC such as judicial continuity that enables families to form trusting relationships with the Judges involved in cases, thus encouraging positive working relationships. These trusting relationships in turn help to encourage behavioural change and can enhance motivation to change. From discussions there is an appetite to move to a problem-solving approach in Wales but as family justice is not devolved it will require the involvement of wider parties. Initial discussions have taken place with the Ministry of Justice around the implementation of Problem-Solving Courts in Wales,

namely relating to the approach of the judiciary to families and how elements of FDAC can be transferred to this. These discussions are ongoing.

Outcome: Expand on the existing work undertaken by the working group and proceed with further conversations with the judiciary, HMCTS and MoJ around how elements of the Court process may be able to incorporate a problem-solving approach to court work. This should be done through the National Family Justice Network and the Local Family Justice Boards.

5. To advise on whether there should be an alternative approach to FDACs and what that should look like to include the problem-solving approach used in Pathfinder to deliver benefits to the widest possible number of families in Wales who may need this support, which may include other complex family situations where drugs and alcohol, mental health and domestic violence are prevalent, in a sustainable and cost-effective way.

As referenced in the previous section, the working group has explored the benefits of the use of a problem-solving approach in court proceedings. In view of the information that is widely available in relation to Problem Solving Courts it is clear there are merits to this approach. Research undertaken by CJI denotes this work can be undertaken in different areas of Court Proceedings and the approach humanises the judiciary and Court users. The research and positive aspects of a problem-solving approach is not new information, Sir James Mumby noted in 2018 that “family courts ought to be but usually are not problem-solving courts” and another judge reporting the process was fair and humane noting there is an appetite within the judiciary to make these changes.

A reform of care proceedings to incorporate problem-solving courts could better serve children and families, improve long-term outcomes and reduce the social and economic cost of repeated court interventions and the cost of children entering into Local Authority care.

The collective feedback on Problem-Solving Courts from parents, the judiciary and other professionals indicates these models of practice including FDAC and Pathfinder are kinder and more effective at positively resolving issues within the Family Court. As noted in the research undertaken by CJI, problem solving approaches are compassionate and procedurally fair court processes, with the relationship between the judge and parents playing a crucial role. The relationship between parents and the judiciary is important and whilst legal advisers are a crucial element of Family Justice it is noted that speaking through legal advisers can sometimes hinder the relationship between families and the judge. The problem-solving model would emphasise the importance of direct communication between judges and parents thus fostering a working relationship and a mutual understanding of expectations and goals. This could include a meeting with the judge when pre-

court proceedings are initiated so there is a tripartite understanding and agreement between the judge, parents and local authority of what is expected to be achieved during pre-proceedings to avert the local authority from issuing court proceedings. This closer working would be similar to the model of FDAC but will build on existing intensive support / edge of care teams working in authorities.

Outcome: Continue to explore expanding the positive, empowering approach used by the Judiciary in FDAC and Pathfinder cases to Public Law Cases within Wales which will support a higher number of children and families and address the issues impacting children and families at risk of care proceedings. To do this the Group recommended exploring the potential further with the judiciary, HMCTS, and local authorities through establishing a further Working Group/ expanding the existing work.

CONCLUSION

There are evident merits that support the scalability of FDACs and there is learning that can be adopted from FDAC to better support children and families subject to court proceedings with there being supporting evidence that problem-solving approaches in Care Proceedings can be beneficial to families. There is also an appetite in the Judiciary to move towards this mode of working.

The successful implementation of Pathfinder across Wales has evidenced a national approach to change in family justice can be implemented. Working relationships between Welsh Government, Local Authorities, Cafcass Cymru and the judiciary are positive with the length of time cases are in care proceedings in Wales outperforming expected targets across England and Wales. It is an opportune time to build on the positive momentum garnered from the changes to Private Law Proceedings by embedding lessons learnt and the good practice that FDACs encourage into cases subject to Public Law.

In tandem with these changes the Group emphasises the importance of the right support at the right time for families with a focus on providing intensive support at an earlier opportunity. Further consideration about the role for existing support services and projects such as Jig-So, IFSS, Reflect and Project Unity could interact with the proposed changes and the ways in which we can offer a trauma informed, multiagency, problem-solving approach across practice in Wales. However, a key message has been the need to secure a firm commitment to support families in a coordinated multi-agency approach from all parties involved, including local authorities, regional partnerships, health boards and domestic abuse services. All parties must work together to achieve the outcomes for these families or models such as the FDAC and IFSS are unsustainable. To bring these parties together there will be a central coordinating role for a team who are able to bring in the

relevant services and professionals at critical points dependent on the family's needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Family Justice Network is recommended to support further work with the judiciary to explore the potential for a Problem-Solving Court approach in Wales taking account of learning from Pathfinder and FDAC; alongside this further work with local authorities and wider partners on the configuration and availability of the edge of care services currently in place across Wales as set out in this paper.

This paper will also be presented to Ministers; the Children Young People and Education (CYPE) and the Legislation, Justice and Constitution (LJC) Committees so they are updated on progress with this work.

August 2025