

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Flaenoriaethau'r Chweched Senedd](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) consultation on [Sixth Senedd Priorities](#)

CYPE SP 118

Ymateb gan: Mary van den Heuvel, Uwch Swyddog Polisi Cymru, Undeb Addysg Cenedlaethol

Response from: Mary van den Heuvel, Senior Policy Officer for Wales, National Education Union

NEU Cymru's response

NEU Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation from the Children, Young People and Education Committee. Our members include teachers, lecturers, leaders and support staff, committed to working tirelessly to support learners in a variety of education settings across Wales.

It is worth emphasising that even though we are in a very different place than we were twelve months ago, Wales' schools, colleges, and other education settings, are not back to business as usual. Covid-19 is still with us.

For our members, that means that there are some immediate, as well as longer term, priorities for education. Our members' need to be kept safe in their jobs, as vital key workers. But they are also passionate about keeping children and young people and the wider community as safe as possible.

Our manifesto¹, created ahead of the Senedd elections, sets out what our members identify as key challenges² for this Welsh Government. We have been pleased that the Welsh Government are taking forward many of our asks. However, it remains critical that in Wales we ensure the Welsh Government does everything it can to:

- Make learning fair and equitable
- Reduce the cost of going to school and college
- Support the education workforce

¹ <https://neu.org.uk/neu-cymru-manifesto>

² <https://neu.org.uk/neu-cymru-manifesto>

Education Recovery Plan

In February, we published our Education Recovery Plan for Wales³. We have been pleased with some of the actions already taken by Welsh Government, set out in the plan.

These include:

- CO₂ monitoring for all education settings
- Implementation of the new curriculum to be more flexible for secondary schools
- Implementation of the ALNET Act to be slowed down, to give everyone more time to prepare
- Renew and Reform⁴, which has some of the same priorities as the NEU Cymru plan

However, some key elements of NEU Cymru's plan remain outstanding, not least the need to focus on support for disadvantaged learners and their families.

The Education Recovery Plan⁵, together with our manifesto, sets out some immediate and longer-term priorities for our members. However, we have learnt more since these were published in February.

We recognise that Wales is not funded in a way which truly reflects need. But Welsh Government will need to find resources to ensure that Wales' education system is truly valued as it should be, and can support our future generations of young people.

We have set out a series of priorities for education which we believe the Committee should consider below as a response to your consultation. These priorities apply across the schools and post-16 sectors:

Workload and wellbeing

This last year has had a huge impact on the education workforce in terms of workload and wellbeing. Work intensity has shown to be significantly high in for teachers, and is understood to be impacting on wellbeing.⁶

³ <https://neu.org.uk/wales-education-recovery-plan>

⁴ <https://gov.wales/renew-and-reform-supporting-learners-wellbeing-and-progression-html>

⁵ <https://neu.org.uk/wales-education-recovery-plan>

⁶ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03054985.2020.1847719>

Whilst Covid-19 has inevitably had a massive impact on everyone in Wales, the education workforce are critical workers, supporting young people with their learning. Schools and colleges have not been operating on a 'business as usual' basis.

We have welcomed the Welsh Government's commitment to tackle workload⁷ and the associated resources, from the Education Support Partnership⁸.

Over the coming academic year, we will be working with our members to help them understand how, as union members, they can challenge excessive workload in the workplace. It is time that everyone in education in Wales values educators and the critical role they do.

Tackling wellbeing, whilst of the utmost importance, cannot happen without tackling workload. We would welcome the Committee undertaking a review/impact assessment of the workload of the education workforce. If we are going to be focusing on implementation of the new curriculum in the coming months, it is critical that the education workforce is enabled to focus on their learners, rather than any accountability regimes.

Workplace wellbeing and safety

As trade unions we have a social partnership with the Welsh Government, and are consulted about changes to workplace guidance. We have been pleased with the level of consultation since the beginning of Covid-19, as it is in everyone's interest to ensure that education settings are safe places to work and learn.

We have largely welcomed the Welsh Government's approach to mitigating the impacts of Covid-19 in schools and colleges – schools and colleges have been through significant changes to support their learners.

Whilst many people have now been vaccinated, our members are concerned that as we return to school this autumn, **we have mitigations in place to protect the workforce, learners and wider community from Covid-19.**

Our members don't want another year of disruption to education. It is critical that we ensure there are measures in place to help ensure there

⁷ <https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-development/workload-and-well-being/workload-and-well-being-overview>

⁸ <https://teachershub.educationsupport.org.uk/>

is no steep rise in Covid-19 infections, which could inevitably impact on education, wellbeing and learning.

NEU Cymru have welcomed the roll-out of CO₂ monitors across schools and colleges in Wales. We look forward to seeing plans for mitigating poor ventilated spaces. It is critical that funding is available to mitigate the impact of any problems with ventilation which the monitors identify.

Whilst the vaccination of young people is an important tool, it is not a sufficient measure in itself to prevent Covid-19 causing disruption to education. We therefore believe that effective safety measures remain important, particularly ventilation, in order to both reduce the extent to which the virus is spread within education settings and within the wider community, and to reduce the extent that staff and students are absent due to Covid or suffer its ill-effects, including those of Long Covid.

Qualifications 2022

We called for centre assessed grades in August of 2020, in our petition “Ensure Fairness for students taking exams in 2021”⁹. Young people have worked hard this year, supported by their teachers and lecturers, and it is right that we celebrate their grades. But no one wants a repeat of the last two years, which is why we have called for a “Plan B”.

The delay in decision making and actions taken during 2020/21 meant uncertainty for everyone in education. Consequently, workload has been incredibly high for teachers and lectures with qualifications cohorts. We welcomed the ‘rebate’ to centres this year, which Welsh Government supported, but our members involved in the assessment process do not want to see a repeat of this year.

Despite WJEC planned adaptations to exams for 2022¹⁰, our members believe that we still need a Plan B for this coming academic year, and that it is critical that any decisions are made now.

Whilst schools and colleges will look more ‘normal’ this coming term, there will need to be arrangements in place for those young people who miss large amounts of their study. This could still be significant numbers of young people absent with Covid-19, and it is right that we have plans in place year to meet their needs. And sufficient time for the education profession to plan, and have all the moderation processes in place, so any excessive workload can be avoided.

⁹ <https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions/244133>

¹⁰ <https://www.wjec.co.uk/articles/summer-2022-adaptations-to-gcse-and-as-a-level-qualifications/>

Qualifications for the future

As we move to implementing the new curriculum, we must take this opportunity to reflect on any positives for young people in capturing their learning from the last two years. Exams, and high stakes accountability, are not for everyone. They simply show what someone did on a particular day.

We have welcomed the principles behind the new curriculum and would welcome a qualifications system which shows what learners can do. We also need to review the use of the algorithm. Everyone in education needs to know their results reflect their own work, and are not simply a reflection of what everyone else did.

To that end, we believe that now is the time to de-couple the qualifications system from accountability mechanisms. As we know, some young people will have huge advantages to others. We need to give education professionals the space to support all their learners, and not falsely focus on improving some grades.

As we have stated above, the qualifications system is a relative one, and as such there will always be winners and losers. The system as it stands does not support disadvantaged learners. We welcome that Qualifications Wales is looking at Qualifications for the new curriculum.

NEU has been working with the Independent Assessment Commission to consider what “Equable, Reliable Assessment” looks like¹¹. We believe these findings will be helpful in informing the assessment of the new curriculum in Wales.

As NEU Cymru said in our manifesto¹², we need a national conversation in Wales now to support a change in the qualifications system which is fit for the future. We believe this is something the Committee could help facilitate.

New curriculum and ALNET Act implementation

We have welcomed the principles behind the ALNET Act and the new curriculum. We have also welcomed that Welsh Government has made some moves towards slowing down implementation, in order to create more time in the system to get this right.

¹¹ <https://www.neweraassessment.org.uk/findings>

¹² <https://neu.org.uk/neu-cymru-manifesto>

Our members are clear, that if we are going to take progressive and positive steps here in Wales, they must be done well. Only the time and space for education professionals to ensure they can fulfil the ambitions of the new curriculum will mean young people are prepared for a future Wales.

NEU Cymru is clear that educators need the space to develop the new curriculum. The education workforce has not been able to take full advantage of the extra INSET days which they have had, as Covid-19 has meant the time has been taken with important matters. Wales' education workforce will need extra time to train and prepare for the extra challenges of the new curriculum. Resources must be made available to ensure this happens.

We do believe there are exciting opportunities to have a new curriculum which truly reflects the needs of learners in Wales. **For example, NEU have developed an anti-racism charter¹³, and we would like every educator to be empowered to embed anti-racism across the curriculum.**

We would welcome continued monitoring of the implementation of these pieces of legislation, in order that they remain true to the intentions of the Donaldson review.

Welsh Language

We support the Welsh Government's target of 1 million Welsh speakers by 2050. But if we are going to achieve this, Welsh Government needs to ensure there is training available to the whole workforce. This will mean funding and providing training opportunities and cover support for those who need time outside the classroom to undertake this training.

Our members believe the language is important and are pleased to see Welsh Government has embedded the Welsh language within the new curriculum.

However, the new curriculum is also underpinned by pedagogical practices, and will require experienced education professionals to ensure that young people are enabled to engage in their learning.

This undoubtedly means that not everyone in the education system will have the Welsh language skills required. Welsh Government should

¹³ <https://neu.org.uk/anti-racism-charter>

therefore fund places for education professionals to learn Welsh to the level required. We need people who can speak Welsh delivering the curriculum, but we also need experienced education professionals to ensure that everyone is supported in their learning.

Support mental well-being for all children and young people

As we said in our manifesto, NEU Cymru is increasingly concerned that the coronavirus pandemic and the unprecedented measures taken to contain its spread has disrupted nearly every aspect of children's lives, including their health, development, learning, behaviour, physical and emotional wellbeing, the economic and social security of their families, and their protection from violence and abuse.

We want Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to be as effective as possible. To be effective, Welsh Government needs to support CAMHS to work in a multi-disciplinary way with General Practitioners. We also believe that learners must have access to all the support they need, especially the education psychologist service. We would also ask for relevant training for educators to ensure they are able to support and sign-post young people appropriately.

In an NEU Cymru member survey conducted in March 2021, **99%** of respondents thought the Welsh Government should support mental well-being for all children and young people.

In response to what can the Welsh Government do to support the mental well-being of children and young people:

80% said more funding for schools and support agencies.

71% said less focus on tests and exams.

85% said better access to CAMHS and to allow them to work closer with GPs.

77% said increased accessibility to the education psychologist service.

66% said more funding for local authorities to increase provision of Specialist Teaching Facilities and special placements.

70% said provide all local authorities with ring fenced funding for the appointment and ongoing training of Mental Health Champions in every school.

Our members echo the concerns of the Youth Parliament report¹⁴ which shows that young people need access to mental health support. We believe the school and college systems alone cannot support young

¹⁴ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58e7b1b717bffc1056c5949b/t/5f7f7828b2794336984f34cc/1602189394419/WYP-mental-health-E-digi.pdf>

people, they need support from a fully funded and improved CAMHS system, with proper signposting for those who do not meet the threshold.

As Welsh Government has looked at a whole school approach to mental health, we welcome this in principle. We believe that training and resources must be made available to ensure

Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER)

Planned changes for the post-16 sector need careful consideration, to ensure they will deliver the best possible outcomes for young people, and those working in the sector.

Any changes should be in line with Welsh Government aims around Fair Work¹⁵. Again, support for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) will need careful consideration and significant investment and support, to deliver choices in terms of education, training, and employment in the post-16 sector, including the plans for the Young Person's Guarantee.

¹⁵ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/fair-work-wales.pdf>