

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Our ref MA/LN/11039/24

Buffy Williams MS
Chair – Children, Young People and Education Committee

28 February 2025

Dear Buffy,

At our oral evidence session on 16 January 2025 on the scrutiny of the Welsh Government's 2025-26 budget I committed to providing additional information to the Committee.

The enclosed provides information on the specific areas requested by the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne Neagle".

Lynne Neagle AS/MS
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg
Cabinet Secretary for Education

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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.

Estimate of what it would cost to roll out free school meals in secondary schools

Education Support to Tackle Socio-economic Disadvantage

The education budget for 2025-26 includes significant funding to focus resources on addressing the impact of socio-economic disadvantage in education alongside funding to improve educational standards for all learners. This includes over £257m through targeted support such as:

Pupil Development Grant (PDG): £127,825,000

The PDG has a key part to play in achieving Welsh Government's ambition of high standards and aspirations for all. The PDG is funding given to schools and educational settings which aims to raise the attainment of children and young people from low-income households.

School Essentials Grant (SEG): £13,096,000

The School Essentials Grant has made a huge difference to many lower income families across Wales, helping to reduce the worry surrounding the purchase of school uniform and equipment.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA): £20,000,000

EMA is targeted support for learners aged 16 to 18 from low-income households to support them with the costs of attending further education

School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP): £5,875,000

This provides: healthy meals; food and nutrition education; physical activity and enrichment sessions, to learners in areas of socio-economic disadvantage for a minimum of 12 days during the school summer holidays.

Family Engagement Officers (FEOs): £3,000,000

FEOs play an important role within Community Focused Schools: establishing and fostering good relationships with families of children and young people at the school; encouraging and supporting parental involvement in the school and engagement in children's learning; and signposting to relevant support and services.

Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM): £93,500,000

UPFSM are already making a real difference across Wales, with nearly 174,500 additional pupils able to access a healthy and nutritious meal each day at lunch time, making a positive contribution towards improving the health and concentration of children and assisting in the raising of standards of learning and attainment.

Costs to increase Free School Meal Eligibility

The Programme for Government committed us to reviewing free school meal eligibility as far as resources allowed. The focus of this has been on extending entitlement to a meal through the Universal Primary Free School Meal (UPFSM) offer.

In the roll out of UPFSM important lessons have been learnt. A number of challenges and costs to extend eligibility would need to be addressed, this includes: the potential need for a new Wales eligibility checking system if adopting a different threshold compared to the UK Government; potential logistical and capacity challenges for schools and local authorities (depending on the scope and scale of any increase in eligibility); unknown estimated capital costs; and workforce development and capacity. For example, in the roll out of UPFSM a capital budget of £60m was required.

Not considering the above factors, as a minimum a review of the income threshold in line with the National Living Wage would increase the threshold to £10,160 (as of April 2025). The estimated net increase in eligible learners taking a free school meal in secondary schools would be around 5,000 (based on 77% take-up) at an annual cost of **at least £3m¹** for the meals alone.

However, the eFSM data is also used as a proxy indicator for socio-economic disadvantage in order to understand and address inequalities. It is necessary therefore to preserve the integrity of that link and ensure that we support children and young people as effectively as possible. We estimate that an increase in the threshold to have a financial impact of £2m for the demand led Schools Essentials Grant and an additional £18m for the Pupil Development Grant.

Therefore, the overall costs of an increase to the threshold of eligibility were not possible to manage as part the recent budget when set in the context of our other priorities and we have sought to support disadvantaged learners in other ways (e.g. through FEOs, SHEP). However, this issue will be revisited as part of the Spending Review in the summer.

The changes that are taking place following the ‘strategic review of education partners’

A review of roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales and delivery of school improvement arrangements was a commitment in our national mission. Following the review stage we have focussed on the design and co-construction of revised school improvement arrangements. It is now almost 12 months since the results of that [review were published](#) and the School Improvement Partnership Programme was established, in that time we have developed a new outline of roles and responsibilities across the education sector with widespread engagement with partners across education in Wales.

Together with local authorities, unions, Estyn, schools and partners from across the sector, we are building a new culture for school improvement, with school-to-school collaborative working at its heart. As part of the process, in November, every local authority in Wales submitted plans to the Welsh Government outlining their approach to delivering local school improvement arrangements. We are working closely with local authorities to support these changes at a local level.

I also committed to providing strong national leadership by setting out a small number of clearly defined and focused national improvement priorities. I have confirmed these as attendance, literacy and numeracy, supported by improved wellbeing.

I have also agreed a set of high-level national functions to support the sector including:

- Establishing a new National Professional Learning and Leadership Support body focussed on delivering a small and prioritised range of national professional learning, this will create a simplified and coherent professional learning landscape.
- Establishing national support programmes to provide intensive, support for the critical cross-curricular skills of literacy and numeracy, along with curriculum design, progression and assessment. This support is being designed with local authorities, practitioners and other partners.

¹ Costed on 190 schools days and £3.20 per meal (based on the universal primary school offer) and includes sixth form students in years 12-14, but not further education colleges, at a take-up rate of 77% (PLASC)

- Establishing an Education Improvement Team within Welsh Government to facilitate regular dialogue with local authorities and schools - connecting national priorities with local delivery.

We recognise that there is significant change in the system and want to ensure the totality of change is coherent and robust. To support this, I have established the National Coherence Group who have considered the changes proposed and provided me advice and observations (which was published on 29 January along with a [written statement](#) on progress).

Information on the funding available to support school improvement partnerships in the context of the establishment of a new national professional learning and leadership body

The tables below outline the movement of professional learning and curriculum funding within the LAEG Reform grant between 2024-25 and 2025-26. We have kept the names of the lines the same as for 2024-25 to enable LAs to see the changes.

In 2025-26 we are providing additional investment of £2,500,000 to support literacy and numeracy; this will be provided via the LAEG. Professional learning funding directed to schools will increase by £1,500,000 to £13,500,000 in 2025-26. Along with the £6,000,000 direct to schools for Curriculum, this brings the total funding direct to schools in 2025-26 to £19,500,000.

As outlined in the evidence paper, in October 2024, I announced my intention to bring together some of the current functions of the regional consortia and local authority partnerships and the National Academy for Education Leadership into a national body. The body will be responsible for designing and delivering professional learning and leadership support on a national level in response to the need for increased consistency and clarity of offer.

The establishment of the National Body means that funding needs to be moved out of the LAEG Reform BEL and into the Teacher Development and Support BEL as the National Body will be responsible for the delivery.

A total of £2.465m is being transferred out of the LAEG Reform BEL into the Teacher Development and Support BEL for the continued delivery of national professional learning programmes for teaching assistants, newly qualified teachers, leaders through the National Body.

A further £1.1m is being transferred from the LAEG Cymraeg 2050 BEL into the Teacher Development and Support BEL for national support for the teaching of Welsh and through the medium of Welsh. £0.6m of this funding will be allocated to the National Body to support Welsh-medium schools on a national basis, and £0.5m will be allocated to the National Centre for Learning Welsh to increase the provision of Welsh language skills professional learning for practitioners. These developments are in line with the ambitions of the Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Bill to develop a workforce that can teach more subjects through the medium of Welsh and to improve the teaching of Welsh in English-medium schools.

£3.565m (£2.465m and £1.1m) has transferred into the Teacher Development and Support BEL and will be utilised to support the new body and the National Centre for Learning Welsh (as detailed in the table below).

Subject to LA agreement over the coming months, we propose to move **£1.73m** for local authority curriculum support from the Education Reform (LAEG) BEL 4501 to the Curriculum and Assessment BEL 5162. This is to take forward enhancement of national capacity for

curriculum design, literacy, numeracy alongside other aspect of curriculum support where economies of scale are agreed (such as international languages, digital skills and RSE).

Professional learning funding:

		2024-25	2025-26			2025-26
LAEG		Allocated to LAs via LAEG	Remaining in LAEG	Transferring to new Body	Transferring to National Centre for Learning Welsh	Total
LAEG (Cymraeg)	Welsh language PL (LA funding)	£2,500,000	£1,400,000	£600,000	£500,000	£2,500,000
LAEG (Reform)	Professional Learning in Schools (direct to schools)	£12,000,000	£13,500,000 <i>(£1,500,000 transfer from school-led PL line)</i>			£13,500,000
LAEG (Reform)	Curriculum reform professional learning programme (LA funding)	£2,700,000	£2,700,000			£2,700,000
LAEG (Reform)	School-led professional learning (LA funding to support school-to-school working)	£3,000,000	£1,500,000 <i>(£1,500,000 transfer to PL in schools line)</i>			£1,500,000
LAEG (Reform)	Professional learning for developing practice and reflection	£900,000		£900,000		£900,000
LAEG (Reform)	A Level and Welsh Bacc PL	£650,000		£650,000		£650,000
LAEG (Reform)	Induction and Early Career PL	£250,000		£250,000		£250,000
LAEG (Reform)	HLTA + TA Pathway (LA funding)	£950,000	£850,000	£100,000		£950,000
LAEG (Reform)	Future leadership programme (LA funding)	£850,000	£285,000	£565,000		£850,000
TOTAL		£23,800,000	£20,235,000	£3,065,000	£500,000	£23,800,000

Curriculum reform funding:

		2024-25	2025-26		2025-26
LAEG		Allocated to LAs via LAEG	Remaining in LAEG	Transferring to fund National Support	Total
LAEG (Reform)	Curriculum reform – schools*	£6,000,000	£6,000,000		£6,000,000
LAEG (Reform)	Regional and local capacity for curriculum development	£3,000,000	£2,500,000	£500,000 (£300k Curriculum Design; £200k RSE)	£3,000,000
LAEG (Reform)	International Languages	£733,000		£733,000	£733,000
LAEG (Reform)	Cross curricular skills support	£1,173,000	£3,173,000 (£673,000 & additional £2,500,000 for L&N)	£500,000 (£300k Literacy & Numeracy; £200k digital)	£3,673,000
TOTAL		£10,906,000	£11,673,000	£1,733,000	£13,406,000

* excludes uplifts to LAEG for school engagement in curriculum workstreams through in-year grant variations

A breakdown of the activities within the Curriculum and Assessment BEL and the Additional Learning Needs BEL

Curriculum and Assessment BEL £23.52m

The Curriculum and Assessment BEL, for example, aligns with the LA support and provides funding for a range of other curriculum related activity – this includes:

- our longitudinal curriculum evaluation and monitoring programme;
- funding to Adnodd for commissioning curriculum related resources and supporting materials;
- the operation of the practitioner focussed National Network;
- national level support programmes – such as those I highlighted in my oral statement of 2 July last year on curriculum design, literacy and numeracy;
- costs associated with the operation of personalised assessments nationally; and
- funding made available to other stakeholder organisations to support schools and settings through the new Curriculum for Wales grant support programme.

Additional Learning Needs BEL £5.597m

The Additional Learning Needs BEL is maintained centrally to fund National ALN support and oversight to improve the delivery of the ALN system. Activities include:

- A formative evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs system;
- Grant funding to secure Wales' Doctorate in Educational Psychology training ten new Educational Psychologists a year, and support Children in Wales' Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Participation Programme;

- National ALN leads to support our work on Welsh Language, Further Education and Health;
- Delivering the legislative review;
- Funding to support inclusive Welsh-medium provision, with activities such as the Welsh dyslexia assessment tool;
- Data and monitoring activity;
- ALN accredited professional learning;
- Communications and engagement cost, associated legal costs, and programme funded staff costs.