

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Y 1,000 diwrnod cyntaf | First 1,000 Days

FTD 18

Ymateb gan: Unigolyn

Response from: Individual

1. This consultation is to be welcome, especially given the Common's vote to trigger Brexit, which creates a particularly challenging policy climate in Wales as for the other jurisdictions, given there will be an as yet unknown fall-out to national, regional and local economies with the loss of EU partnership, including loss of access to the EU single market and loss of EU funding. This will no doubt herald a major funding crises when it comes to local asset-bases, community resources, zones, places, amenities, agencies, communities, charities, schools, and joined up services across multi-agencies. One can only envisage the school-community programmes to be dismantled, which will significantly impact on children's and young people's educational & health inequalities.
- 2 My own interest in this consultation is both personal and professional: my family immigrated to the UK from Australia in 2006 and as I live part-time on *Ynys Môn* I am learning Welsh including its social histories and cultural studies. I intend to retire here and encourage my grandchildren to learn Welsh and about Wales, but I have grave concerns about children's and young people's futures given structural economic change in Wales and xUK in the wake of de-industrialisation over decades never mind Brexit.
- 3 My professional interest stems from my work as Professor of Teacher Education with a particular research history in both Australia and

England on teachers' work in disadvantaged schools (see Beckett, 2013, 2014, 2016); and my active participation in the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Commission on Poverty and Policy Advocacy, which worked throughout 2016 to do a reconnaissance of research on poverty, education & schooling across the four jurisdictions of the UK: please see <https://www.bera.ac.uk/project/bera-research-commissions/poverty-and-policy-advocacy>

- 4 Given these qualifications, I offer this individual contribution with advice predominantly on the terms of this consultation by the Children, Young People & Education Committee: this needs to be an exercise in critical analyses of the policies and programmes that support the early parent role, before birth and during the first 2 years of a child's life, and crucially NOT just crude measures of how effective these are in supporting children's emotional and social capabilities and development. Such critical analyses should be done with a view towards building capacity for early years' teachers and others to participate in professional knowledge-building about fitting Welsh interventions in response to children and young people marked by poverty and cumulative multiple deprivation and their experiences of educational and health inequalities.
- 5 As such, this consultation needs to focus its attention on idiosyncratically Welsh-inspired policy logic. This is not to say the Welsh Assembly Government's policies and programmes remain immune from policy influences across the transnational communities of the UK as it stands nor global policy influences. But generic policy borrowing should not ignore the unique Welsh social context and distinctive social conditions nor Welsh social, cultural, & industrial histories.

- 6 Our BERA Commission work proved instructive to get some distance on the assumptions informing policy–practice orthodoxies in regards poverty and schooling in each jurisdiction. To be sure there was much to be learned from Frank Field’s (2009) *report* of the *Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances* and global initiatives in education, for example Munns et al (2014) *Exemplary Teachers of Students in Poverty* in Australia and Gorski (2013) *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty* in the USA, for example. But of significance was the specific attention given to respective socio–economic organisation in these transnational and global settings.
- 7 The contribution from Wales (Egan in Ivinston et al, 2017) stated it suffers from significant levels of poverty and continued with the following details. Approximately 23% of the population lives in permanent income–related poverty (a figure that has changed little in the last decade) and perhaps another 20% of the population live close to the poverty line and move above and below it over a period of years. Whilst there are large concentrations of people living in poverty caused by unemployment in the post–industrial communities of Wales, there are more poor people outside of those areas, scattered across Wales and often in some form of work. Approximately one third of children in Wales live in poverty and this figure is growing again (Adamson, 2008; Welsh Government, 2013a and 2014; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2014, all cited by Egan in Ivinston et al, 2017).
- 8 The same holds for this consultation by the Children, Young People & Education Committee, which needs to step back & get some distance on the assumptions and orthodoxies in its policies and programmes. This consultation’s focus on children, parents & families only serve to individualise the issues, which suggests a conservative global neoliberal reading of social problems in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government thereby runs a risk: by ignoring social context and social conditions of children’s and young people’s educational and health

inequalities in Wales, it misses an opportunity to focus squarely on Welsh poverty apropos its particular socio-economic organisation now and post-Brexit and policy-practice solutions, past, present and future.

- 9 It follows the focus of this consultation needs to take into account Wales' socio-economic organisation in urban and rural settings, and thankfully there already exists an extraordinary amount of critical analyses of policies and programmes. See for example, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009) study, *What is needed to end child poverty in Wales?*; The Welsh Assembly Government's (2011) *Child Poverty Strategy for Wales*; and Children in Wales – Plant yng Nghymru (2014) *Child and family poverty in Wales: A snapshot of key issues raised by families*. Then there is The National Assembly for Wales (2001) *The Learning Country. A Paving Document. A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales*.
- 10 Also instructive to this consultation, for two reasons, is the work of the Consortiwm GwE, Gogledd Cymru (North Wales) across Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Wrexham councils since 2012 (see <http://www.gwegogledd.cymru/information-centre/deprivation>). Estyn, like Ofsted in England, insist on a narrow framing of concerns about poverty & schooling by homing in on improving the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals, a proxy indicator of poverty. Secondly, this consortium is likely set up to fail as long as Estyn makes evaluative judgments on a contracted range of measures and then ranks on a four-point scale of excellent, good, adequate or unsatisfactory across five key disciplines. This more or less buys into England's ways of working, bearing in mind it has the dubious distinction of being 'a warning' to other systems globally (Lingard, 2009), which is to compromise the potential for developing peculiarly Welsh policy-practice solutions.

- 11 This suggests Wales' education system might be resistant to research evidence that consistently shows teachers working in pre-schools and schools where children and young people are marked by poverty & cumulative multiple deprivation are burdened by restrictive teaching methods and pressures to meet unrealistic benchmarks set by governments (see Iverson et al, 2017). This means finding ways to negotiate these tensions and challenges and this should involve critical policy analyses, critical reviews of the international research literature, but also close studies of local area data and neighbourhood studies for local pre-schools and schools. It also means recognition that teaching, like other multi-agency and health work, is a research-informed profession (Lingard and Renshaw, 2010; Menter & Murray, 2011).
- 12 My own work experience in Australia and England, and indeed with the BERA Commission on Poverty and Policy Advocacy, is to encourage professional learning communities to focus on child poverty as it affects children's and young people's lives, learning and schooling experiences. In the north of England, I worked out a contextually-sensitive and locally-responsive CPD programme for practising teachers and academic partners to engage with each other and with local government as well as multi-agency and health workers, so they can fashion a form of educative schooling for students and families with complex needs. This includes their health needs.
- 13 The example set by Estyn not only needs rethinking so it does not nullify a peculiarly Welsh initiative and shut down Consortiwm GwE and others beyond Gogledd Cymru (North Wales), it needs to be averted by the Children, Young People & Education Committee. This will only happen if this consultation were to distinguish between structural solutions and 'local' solutions underpinned by idiosyncratic Welsh policies, which are crucial to social problems endemic in the First 1,000 days of a child's life—from pregnancy through to a child's 2nd birthday. While this is identified as a critical window of time that sets

the stage for a person's intellectual development and lifelong health, it also needs to be recognized that for so many families and local communities it is a time of local struggle in the current socio-economic climate in Wales that does not always augur well for children and young people.

- 14 Following this consultation by the Children, Young People & Education Committee, it needs to make opportunities for local school communities with other local institutions including universities to build Wales' social and political capital to develop research-informed policy and practice with evidence bases. Such professional learning communities should be empowered to facilitate collaborative work and build theoretically-informed practical Welsh knowledge about poverty and cumulative multiple deprivation. This means going past inspections and crude measures of outcomes and effectiveness, towards professionally determined 'local' solutions facilitated by consortia where early years teachers come together with academic partners, local government and multi-agency and health workers.
- 15 This means that together consortia across Wales engage in critical discussions about the Welsh Index of Deprivation as it effects any initiatives concerned to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of children: from pregnancy, for example through positive parenting, high immunisation rates and tackling smoking in pregnancy.
- 16 This also means that consortia address the shortcomings of individualised outcomes-based efforts to deliver improved child health across Wales: for example prevention of obesity and the promotion of health-enhancing behaviours for every child such as eating a well-balanced diet, playing actively, and having an appropriate weight and height for their age and general health.
- 17 There needs to be recognition of critical studies across Wales of child health inequalities, with a specific focus on child poverty and disabled

children, linked to poverty & cumulative multiple deprivation, including unemployment & welfare dependency. For example, see Sure Start/Flying Start, part of the Communities First Strategy, which included training staff with nursery backgrounds, noted by the Welsh Government (2013b) *National Evaluation of Flying Start: Impact Report*, see also the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods (*WISERD*), established in 2008, and the Public Policy Institute for Wales, established in 2014.

- 18 This is not to ignore critical studies in the wider UK, for instance, RCPCH *State of Child Health 2017 Report*, Wickham et al's (2016) *Poverty and child health in the UK: using evidence for action*, with a lineage back to the Black Report (1980) & Margaret Whitehead's (1988) *The Health Divide*, plus Wilkinson (1996) *Unhealthy Societies. The Afflictions of Inequality* and Wilkinson & Pickett (2009) *The Spirit Level*.
- 19 The RCPCH's strap line 'Child health jeopardy due to an alarming gap in rich and poor' speaks to the Children, Young People & Education Committee's concern to reduce child deaths and injury prevention. However, its reference to 'the most deprived areas of Wales' surely speaks to the need for a social view of health, including economic & social reform: what might this look like in post-Brexit Wales?
- 20 Likewise the Committee's focus on what is required to support effective child development and emotional and social well-being needs to go past an individual behaviourist orientation, while its concern with interventions delivered outside the health service to help detect and address developmental delays could gloss over the lived experiences & what it might be like to be living 'in the most deprived areas of Wales' with worsening conditions, for example.
- 21 The Committee's focus on improving learning and speech and language development through the home learning environment hints at affirmative action programs, but before homing in on access to

early years' provision (including childminders, preschools and day nurseries) we need to ask about disadvantage & cumulative multiple deprivation, life chances & families' experiences of educational and health inequalities.

22 Finally, the Committee's framing of its last concern in terms of poor parenting and disruptive family relationships suggests a deficit reading of families and children in poverty but it is not to ignore educational & health inequalities, given domestic violence, mental health issues and substance misuse through effective safeguarding.

23 Throughout the BERA Commission on Poverty and Policy Advocacy we demonstrated some ways to act collectively and to build consortia across transnational and international borders. For example, we had input from Australian colleagues, who also attended our BERA pre-conference day & 2016 BERA conference in Leeds in September. Given a return invitation, a few of us attended the AARE poverty network pre-conference in Brisbane 16–17 November and 2016 AARE conference in Melbourne. We have now extended one of the proposed pilot studies on the 'histories of poverty' in London, Cardiff, & Bradford to include Sydney.

24 The work of our BERA Commission has much to offer in support of the work of the Welsh Assembly Government and this Children, Young People & Education Committee. As my contribution to this consultation shows, the complexities of the problems of children's and young people's educational & health inequalities in Wales demands unique & innovative policy thinking & theorising now and post-Brexit. At issue are the assumptions and policy orthodoxies borrowed from elsewhere, whereas what is required are the opportunities for multi-disciplinary research teams working with practitioners in consortia co-developing peculiarly Welsh policy-practice solutions with evidence bases at national, regional and local levels.

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