

WRITTEN EVIDENCE PAPER TO THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Committee with an update on educational improvement, focusing on specific areas of interest to the Committee.

Refreshed Educational Improvement Plan

2. We will be publishing the refreshed educational improvement plan to succeed Qualified for Life at the most appropriate time for the profession. It will include the Government's response to the OECD's Rapid Policy Assessment, and our plan to raise standards and reduce the attainment gap. Effective implementation of the new curriculum will be at its heart.

Progress against my ten education priorities

3. Taking each of the priorities in turn, I am providing the Committee with an update on each of the ten priorities for education in Wales, which I have agreed with the First Minister, and which are included in *Taking Wales Forward*.

Reducing infant class sizes.

4. Class sizes remain a major concern for parents and teachers. On 24 January I announced a new £36 million fund to address infant class sizes. This investment (capital and revenue) linked to the wider education reform strategy, seeks to improve early years' attainment, target those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and support teachers to be innovative and increase pupil engagement.
5. Funding will be targeted at classes with more than 29 pupils. International research and evidence shows us that a reduction in class sizes makes the most difference for the youngest pupils and particularly those from poorer and/or minority language backgrounds. The criteria for the grant funding therefore reflects this best practice.

Ensuring every child gets the best start in life through an expanded Pupil Deprivation Grant (Now the Pupil Development Grant) (PDG).

6. Over £90m will be invested through the PDG in 2017-18 to help education services close the attainment gap for our disadvantaged learners. In March, I announced new arrangements for the extended PDG that include the Early Years PDG for learners in the Foundation Phase being doubled to £600. The grant has also been extended to support three year old looked after children at the same rate as all other looked after learners and

to fund learners who are in education other than at school (EOTAS). Previously only those who are in pupil referral units have received funding. Recognising the grant supports a broader cohort of learners to achieve equity it has been renamed the Pupil Development Grant.

Prioritising schools' access to super-fast broadband within the national programme.

7. Delivery of improved connectivity to eligible schools under the Learning in Digital Wales (LiDW) Grant was completed in Summer 2016 and broadband upgrades were successfully provided to over 960 schools in Wales. The remaining 33 primary schools required alternative solutions (such as fibre to the cabinet, satellite and wireless), which has now been provided. All eligible schools in Wales now have connections of at least 10Mbps for primary schools and 100Mbps for secondary.
8. A further £5 million has been allocated under LiDW – Investment in Broadband which was announced in November 2016. This funding has been allocated to remove technology limitations at 340 schools which cannot easily increase bandwidth to support future requirements such as the Digital Competence Framework and developments in the Hwb platform.
9. My officials have been working with local authority colleagues and the Public Sector Broadband Aggregation (PSBA) supplier to finalise the scope and commercial arrangements. Orders for the new services have started to be placed with the first delivery of new circuits expected early in the academic year 2017/18.

Incentivising, recognising and promoting teaching excellence so that we raise standards across the board.

10. The OECD has recognised our approach to co-construction and noted that the “commitment to improving the teaching and learning in Wales’ schools is visible at all levels of the education system”.
11. From September 2019 we will introduce a system where all ITE programmes will be accredited by the Education Workforce Council’s Initial School Teacher Training Committee (The Board). The new accreditation criteria, published in March, makes it clear the requirements for an increased role for schools, a clear role for universities; joint ownership of the ITE programme; structured opportunities to link school and university learning; and the centrality of research. The Board will also give consideration to how the programmes will raise the quality of provision e.g. attract the right people with the right skills, qualifications and an aptitude for teaching, to enter the profession.

12. We are committed to developing a National Approach to Professional Learning that builds capacity from ITE and is embedded in evidence-based research in the self-improving school system. The development of a National Approach to Professional Learning is being led by regional consortia, Estyn, pioneers and partner schools to ensure all practitioners, including support staff, work based learning providers and FE practitioners are able to develop the skills in pedagogy and leadership to successfully deliver the requirements of the new curriculum.
13. Enhanced digital professional learning support will be available this year, and a fully integrated National Approach to Professional Learning implemented by September 2018. The new digital professional learning approach has been tried and tested by digital and professional learning pioneers to provide a continuum to embed the Digital Competence Framework.
14. Wales is also one of four countries leading on international research led by the OECD to transform schools into learning organisations. Pioneer schools are driving this innovative project, working to develop a 'Made in Wales' Schools Learning Organisations (SLO) Model. An SLO Survey targeting a 20% sample of schools across Wales will be launched in June 2017. OECD will host a national event for pilot schools in July to focus on initial outcomes of the SLO study.
15. The consultation on new professional standards for teaching and leadership closed on 4 May. There was overall support for the standards structure, content and implementation timescale. This is consistent with feedback received from many individual teachers and leaders who have welcomed the new standards, commenting positively on how they support effective classroom practice and leadership and how they provide a focus for career-long professional learning. Newly qualified teachers will work with the new standards from September. All other teachers will be required to adopt the new standards by September 2018 allowing them a year in which to move from the current standards and are intended to be an integral part of the evidence required for the award of Qualified Teacher Status.
16. In Wales, the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) provides an opportunity for overseas trained teachers who do not hold QTS, but who wish to become fully recognised teachers in Wales, to be employed in schools to consolidate their existing teaching experience and skills against the requirements of the QTS Standards in Wales and be assessed against those standards at the end of an agreed programme. The length of the training programme can be as short a period as three months full-time/one school term for well-qualified, experienced teachers depending on their previous experience.
17. On 16 May I gave an update on the National Academy of Educational Leadership in the Senedd. It will be up and running by Spring 2018, although work will continue apace before then, so that the Academy will be

able to broker and quality assure a range of programmes; have a role in ensuring provision across regions; support leadership at all levels; and work with others to identify and support current and future leaders

Promoting and enhancing both academic and vocational routes into and through further and higher education, and the national, international and civic roles of our educational institutions. This includes both full and part-time opportunities that will benefit learners of all ages, employers and communities.

18. Through regular dialogue, and in my recent remit letter(s) to HEFCW, I have challenged the higher education sector in particular, to meet the challenges in this priority.
19. The sector's constructive engagement in my Brexit Working Group and through other forums has been welcome. I have been able to confirm that students from the EU will be eligible for financial support in both 2017/18 and 2018/19 academic years when studying in Wales.
20. As part of the £20 million made available through HEFCW to support strategic change, HEFCW invited institutions to come forward with higher level apprenticeship plans in key areas, working across sectors.
21. My response to the Diamond Review emphasised our "whole system" approach to a progressive and sustainable student support system. From 2018/19 we will deliver a unique system that delivers parity in support for full-time and part-time undergraduates, and post-graduate students.
22. An Adult Learning policy is being developed alongside a review of the delivery structure and funding model of adult learning to ensure that our hardest to reach learners, and those with basic skills and ESOL needs, have the necessary skills to progress into further learning or employment. We are also supporting the further education sector to develop its provision for More Able and Talented (MAT) learners.

The impact of current policy on surplus school places is reviewed, with emphasis on rural schools, to better take account of future growth trends.

23. Last November I announced my strategy for rural and small schools, which recognises that schools in different parts of Wales face different challenges as we move forward with our reforms. As part of this I will consult, shortly, on strengthening the School Organisation Code in respect of a presumption against closure of rural schools. We are also developing the first-ever list, and designation, of rural schools.
24. This does not mean that rural schools will never close. However, the case for closure must be strong and all viable options to close must be conscientiously considered, including federation. Our funding will

encourage and support the development of federations, build effective leadership, support greater school to school working, and the use of new technologies.

25. Welsh medium education must be a key consideration in the planning of school places. Ensuring the availability of early years through to primary and secondary schools needs to be planned through the local Welsh Medium Education Fora. The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans therefore will be central to this work ensuring collaboration between key stakeholders and a clear and coherent strategy for Welsh medium education.

Consulting further on the specific recommendations of the Hazelkorn review.

26. A full consultation on Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) system reform will be published before the summer recess. This will take forward the Government's response to the Hazelkorn Report which I delivered in the Senedd earlier this year. Based on Professor Hazelkorn's recommendations, we will consult on proposals for establishing a single, strategic authority, responsible for overseeing all aspects of post-compulsory education and training.

Exploring a potential expansion of the remit of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to include further education.

27. In August 2016, I announced the establishment of a task and finish group to review the future role of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. I have asked the group as part of their work to consider whether the Coleg's remit should extend to the post-16 sector (further education and work based learning), and if so, to provide me with potential options on how to take this forward. The work of the group is nearing completion and they will be providing me and the Minister for Lifelong Learning & Welsh Language with a final report and recommendations in the near future.

Prioritising support for enhanced links between education and industry, enabling innovation and entrepreneurship across our public and private sectors in collaboration with our universities and colleges.

28. I remain committed to supporting the Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program (REAP) that draws on partnerships and the experience of five stakeholder groups including academia, corporate business and entrepreneurs to develop an innovation driven entrepreneurship strategy in Wales. As part of their engagement, REAP are holding a major stakeholder event in June for leaders from the five stakeholder groups and I have agreed to host a University Symposium with the Vice Chancellors and Business School Deans to discuss opportunities for collaboration between academia and the business

community.

29. I have also met with key stakeholders to explore how to create the right environment to maximise the commercialisation opportunities that arise from academic knowledge. Programmes such as SMARTExpertise offer financial support and encourages innovative collaboration projects between industry and Welsh research organisations.

The recommendations of the Diamond Review are considered, with a view to early implementation where appropriate, but there will be no negative effect on the higher education budget if there are any changes.

30. It is the Government's intention to implement, with only minor modification, the full Diamond Package, whilst also delivering a future dividend for further and higher education.

31. Our response to the Review outlined a phased approach towards implementing accepted recommendations from 2018/19 onwards. The work necessary to enable implementation is well underway. Adopting a phased approach has allowed there to be a focus on those areas where work is needed most urgently.

32. At the same time, I launched a consultation to capture the views of interested parties on the implementation of proposed changes to student support funding. At the heart of the Diamond Review recommendations are proposals for reforming higher education funding arrangements and, in particular, for re-working the student support package - to move to a simpler system that recognises the holistic costs of higher education study to the students and directs the highest level of support to those who are most in need. We will be publishing a summary report on the consultation responses in due course.

Summary of changes to prioritisation or expected output within the Education portfolio.

33. You have requested details on the latest Budget Expenditure Line (BEL) allocations within the Education MEG and any changes made since the 2017-18 Final Budget. Due to the timing of the First Supplementary Budget, there has been no change to the Final budget BEL tables, which were published on 20 December 2016.

34. Compared to the Final Budget 2017-18 allocations there will be a recurrent decrease in Resource DEL allocation for Education by £18 million in financial year 2017-18 and decrease in AME non cash by £6 million. The decreases relates to the two transfers mentioned below:

a) *Careers Wales*

35. A Resource DEL transfer out of £18.8 million from the Education MEG to the Economy and Infrastructure MEG. The funding of £18.8 million supports Careers Wales delivery of careers information, advice and guidance services. The careers service has a key role in supporting and improving the alignment between the learning pathways and qualifications which individuals pursue and the needs of employer and the wider labour market. Careers Wales is a delivery vehicle for a number of employability related programmes such as the Individual Skills Gateway, Jobs Growth Wales and ReAct. Transferring the funding of Careers Wales to the E&I MEG will reduce complexity and help align wider funding decisions.

36. An AME non cash transfer out of £6 million from the Education MEG to the Economy and Infrastructure MEG. The funding relates to the movement in pension provision. It is necessary to make provision for the AME non cash transfer since this is directly based on the valuation of the CCDG pension liabilities.

b) NHS Bursary Scheme

37. A transfer in of £0.800 million from the Health, Well-being and Sport MEG to the Education MEG in respect of providing students support due to changes arising from the NHS Bursary scheme in 2017/18. This increase in funding will become part of the Welsh Government Learning Grant BEL 4704. I have worked collaboratively with the Minister for Health and Social Services to agree the support that is available to students who would have received the NHS Bursary.

38. All transfers outlined above will feature in a future supplementary budget in 2017-18 and will be subject to scrutiny by the Finance Committee and approval by the Assembly in plenary. Other than these, at present, there are no further changes to the allocations or reprioritisation of funding planned for a Supplementary Budget in the future.