

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

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

Cyllido Ysgolion yng Nghymru | School Funding in Wales

SF 03

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Penaethiaid Uwchradd Sir Benfro Response from: Pembrokeshire Association of Secondary Headteachers

The following is submitted on behalf of Pembrokeshire Association of Secondary Headteachers in response to the committee's Call for evidence regarding:

- the **sufficiency** of school funding in Wales; and
- the **way** school budgets are determined and allocated.

First, I would like to express our thanks and appreciation of the committee and members of the National Assembly for Wales for undertaking this consultation and providing us with an opportunity to contribute.

As set out in the guidance, our submission responds to the areas of focus. For clarity we have include all the areas of focus on the consultation page but where appropriate we have indicated that we have insufficient knowledge or information to comment on a specific aspect, in an informed or useful way.

1. the sufficiency of provision for school budgets, in the context of other public service budgets and available resources

Response

We can only respond with regards to our first-hand experience, as professionals currently delivering education in schools and the sufficiency of the resources being provided against the level of service provision being expected of us.

In the forthcoming year 2019-20 all of the secondary schools in the local authority are projecting deficit budgets. As deficit budgets are not permitted all our secondary schools have to take action in order to balance budgets. In the main, this will include reducing the number of teaching staff, reducing the breadth of the curriculum offered, partially at Key Stage 4 and 5 and a need to increase the number of pupils in classes to enable fewer teachers to deliver to the curriculum. There will be reductions in the amount of time dedicated to leadership and management which will increase the workload of those members of staff and reduce their capacity to focus on improving school performance. Reductions in support staff means there is less or no support for the pupils who are less able or have additional learning needs, many of whom are the most vulnerable learners and in need of most support. Maintenance and investment in capital equipment is on the basis

of failure or immediate Health and Safety risk. In addition, levels of capitation, the funding delegated directly to a department in a school to provide equipment, materials, stationary and text books to pupils, is so limited that the learning experience of pupils is severely restricted.

Over the past three years most of our secondary schools have experienced flat line budgets and increased costs. Schools have now exhausted any surpluses that they may have had and are now no longer able to include any contingency funding, which is not good practice in any critical service provision. In fact, many secondary schools are on their second round of redundancies and in some instances their third.

Whilst we understand and accept there is a “context of other public service budgets and available resources” our evidence is that there is currently insufficient funds being provided to enable us to continue to deliver anything other than the **statutory** service that is required of us and we are concerned that even this may not be sustainable unless what is expected of us is reduced, rather than ever expanding.

2. the extent to which the level of provision for school budgets complements or inhibits delivery of the Welsh Government’s policy objectives;

Response

The Welsh Government states “Our national mission is to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and deliver an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence”.

Successful implementation of the new National Curriculum for Wales with its four purposes (Ambitious, capable learner; Healthy confident Individuals; Enterprising, creative contributors; Ethical, informed citizens), is placed at significant risk, if funding is not improved. There is funding and support for pioneer schools and groups and therefore it may be argued that the ‘global’ schools budget makes provision. However, all other schools have to plan and prepare for the new curriculum with the resources provided that are solely intended for the delivery of the current education provision, not future provision.

At all our schools provision of all non-statutory activities is being reduced and at risk of ceasing. This means that the current school population of young people do not have access to the enriching experience that should be available to them. Schools are also increasingly expected to provide emotional and mental health support to young people, as provision previously provided by other services is reduced or withdrawn completely. We appear to have become the backstop for a whole range of services for which we are neither funded nor qualified.

Rightly, Welsh Government has as a priority to improved outcomes of learners. This is being undermined as schools are being driven to reduce numbers of teachers and school leaders at all levels, resulting in less time and capacity to improve standards. This also undermines the Education

Secretary's stated desire to reduce teacher workload; whilst the number of unnecessary tasks may have been or planned to be reduced, what remains is being done by fewer people. Regardless of pay, such working conditions are unlikely to attract new recruits to the profession, which is also an important priority for the Government and we are certainly finding it exceptionally difficult to recruit high quality candidates when posts are advertised in Pembrokeshire.

Welsh Government now has devolved responsibility for Teachers' Pay and Conditions for Wales. Welsh Government commissioned an independent panel to review the pay and conditions and to make recommendations that "would support the national mission for education in Wales". The recommendations in the recently released report 'Teaching: A Valued Profession', are ambitious and will require a significant allocation of resource to implement."

3. the relationship, balance and transparency between various sources of schools' funding, including core budgets and hypothecated funding;
4. the local government funding formula and the weighting given to education and school budgets specifically within the Local Government Settlement.
5. Welsh Government oversight of how Local Authorities set individual schools' budgets including, for example, the weighting given to factors such as age profile of pupils, deprivation, language of provision, number of pupils with Additional Learning Needs and pre-compulsory age provision;

Response (3, 4 & 5)

Current arrangements through the Section 52 Report, provides a degree of transparency. However, as the level and means by which funds are delegated differs from Local Authority to Local Authority it is all but impossible to make a fair 'like for like' comparison. For example, one Local Authority may nominally delegate a higher percentage of the school's budget directly to schools in their area than an authority in another area, but that first authority may then 'require' schools to 'buy back' services from that authority, where the other authority may not. The current funding system via Local Authority can therefore create a 'gaming' environment, which appears to delegate a particular percentage of budgets to a school but in reality does not.

The other aspect of school funding that can lead to less transparency is the contribution made to education via local council tax. Clearly each local authority will have its own particular priorities but they also have significant contextual differences such as rurality which can require more resources being expended on transport. Such differences make comparisons less and less valid, more complex and therefore less transparent.

Unfortunately the more Welsh Government looks to have oversight of how

Local Authorities set individual schools' budgets including, for example, the weighting given to factors such as age profile of pupils, deprivation, language of provision, number of pupils with Additional Learning Needs and pre-compulsory age provision the less autonomous and responsive the Local Authorities become in addressing local priorities.

Public money must clearly be spent on the purpose for which it is provided, but local authorities must be able to respond to local needs and priorities. Welsh Government might therefore be better served not by having oversight of how Local Authorities 'set' individual schools' budgets but by measuring outcomes (results). The point we believe is not about trying to 'regulate' specific inputs (resources) but the effective use of those resources.

6. progress and developments since previous Assembly Committees' reviews (for example those of the **Enterprise and Learning Committee in the Third Assembly**);

Response

We are unable to meaningfully contribute to this aspect of the committees work

7. the availability and use of comparisons between education funding and school budgets in Wales and other UK nations

Response

The continuing divergence between how schools are funded, the purpose of that funding and how school systems are structured in Wales compared to other parts of the UK makes useful comparison at least unhelpful and at worst impenetrable. This is because of the emergent dominance of the academy system in England and different academy models within it, where Local Education Authorities no longer operate in any comparative way to schools and Local Authorities in Wales.

Scotland and Ireland may have more structural similarities to Wales but different priorities for the funding of public services and how these are administered also makes direct comparisons unhelpful.

Therefore, the only comparator of value would appear to be the 'national spend per child of school age' on the provision of education' and how effectively that funding has been used to achieve that country's national education objectives. These objectives may be comparators to the performance of other nations relating to such things as GDP, PISA assessments, health and well-being indexes, etc. or a combination of several measures, but these would be for Welsh Government to determine on the basis of national priorities at any particular time. It would appear that for education these are already well defined for the current Welsh Government through four purposes of the new National Curriculum for Wales.