

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 22

Ymateb gan: Cyngor y Gweithlu Addysg

Response from: Education Workforce Council

About the Education Workforce Council (EWC)

1. The Education Workforce Council (EWC) is the independent regulator in Wales for teachers in maintained schools, Further Education teachers and learning support staff in both school and FE settings, as well as youth workers and people involved in work-based learning.

The principal aims of Council are to:

- contribute to improving the standards of teaching and the quality of learning in Wales;
- maintain and improve standards of professional conduct amongst teachers and those who support teaching and learning in Wales;
- safeguard the interests of learners, parents and the public and maintain public trust and confidence in the education workforce.

2. This response will focus mainly on matters within the Council's core remit.

A complex system

3. Education and health are two significant areas of public expenditure in Wales. It is important that the balance between the two is appropriate as spending on education offers, in many instances, a "cost save" for the future.
4. The Council understands that both local authorities and schools have seen cuts in their budgets in recent years and many schools, particularly in the secondary phase are experiencing financial challenges. While the Council does not have specific detailed knowledge of local authority and school funding, it does highlight a number of matters where it has received feedback and that have been prevalent in the press.
 - (a) The Council invites the Committee to consider whether existing funding processes, formulae and weightings are appropriate, both at a national and local authority level. It is important that the correct

drivers are used in allocating funding to schools and for the correct purposes. Also, a significant amount of funding is unhypothecated, restricting the flexibility in its use and preventing targeting of local issues.

(b) In a recent Children, Young People & Education Committee meeting¹, the Cabinet Secretary was questioned about the level of reserves some schools are holding. When school leadership is faced with uncertainty in levels of funding year on year, this situation can be inevitable. Evidence gathered via interviews with headteachers and key stakeholders for a recent EWC research project highlighted that financial management was one of the aspects of headship that were found to be most difficult. Additionally, the issue was also raised that advice around financial management was often sought from the governing body. Schools with strong governing bodies that have members with finance backgrounds are therefore in a better position than those that do not have this expertise within their school.

(c) We increasingly see initiatives and funding streams identified for specific purposes, for example:

- £36 million fund to reduce infant class sizes (January 2017)
- £500,000 for Welsh language education resources (December 2017)
- £3 million of support for Wales' brightest and most talented pupils (27 February 2018)
- £14 million for school repairs (Kirsty Williams, 3 March 2018)
- £24 million package to help teachers deliver the new curriculum - £9 million for the National Approach to Professional Learning this financial year, increasing to £15 million next financial year (Kirsty Williams, 12 November 2018).

We consider it is important that there is a coherent long-term strategy for school funding which is evidence based, rather than piecemeal initiatives, so that schools are able to plan effectively. Typically school governing bodies and headteachers make appropriate and well-judged decisions about the application of funding received. Governing bodies are best placed to determine where funding should be spent and their decisions should not be constrained by silo funding.

¹ Children, Young People & Education Committee, November 8 2018. Available from: <http://record.assembly.wales/committee/5100>

- (d) Increasingly, large sums have been passed to regional consortia, who are charged with school improvement. It is not always clear how such funding is administered, with some monies retained and other monies passed directly to individual schools without local authorities having an understanding of the funding involved. The recent Estyn annual report², also highlights that there are still concerns in some consortia areas about their progress despite the fact that they have been in operation since 2012.
- (e) Supply costs represent a significant expense to schools. The EWC is now working with over 65 supply agencies in Wales and we have some 4600 teachers and 5300 learning support workers who indicate their primary employment as supply on the Register of Education Practitioners.
- (f) Negative press around funding issues in schools, such as the recent article outlining 400 teacher jobs under threat in Swansea³ contribute to how teaching is perceived as a profession of choice. EWC data already show that teacher numbers have been falling year on year, that Initial Teacher Education providers are failing to recruit to target, and that there are difficulties recruiting teachers from certain subject areas (e.g. Welsh, STEM) and to certain posts (Headteachers). There is a concern that these issues may escalate if not addressed in a timely manner.
- (g) The EWC registers and regulates practitioners in a number of education settings, including further education and work-based learning. We understand that some schools subsidise post-16 provision with pre-16 funding due to financial constraints. This is clearly of concern.
- (h) With the introduction of new legislation in relation to Additional Learning Needs, we would invite the Committee to consider whether funding for this specific area is sufficient.
- (i) Finally, the Council would like to see more data available for comparative and benchmarking purposes in respect of school funding.

² Estyn Annual Report 2018 available from https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/ESTYN_Annual%20Report_Accessible_English_2018.pdf

³ Walesonline (November 2018): 400 teacher jobs are under threat in Swansea, the council leader has warned. Available from: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/400-teacher-jobs-under-threat-15389488>