



The Public Accounts Committee
Inquiry into Regional Education Consortia
Tuesday 21 March 2017

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to submit written evidence to the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts Committee (PAC) inquiry into Regional Education Consortia.
2. The NASUWT is the largest teachers' union in Wales representing teachers and school leaders.

GENERAL COMMENTS

3. The NASUWT offers the comments and observations which follow on the inquiry into Regional Education Consortia (the Consortia) under scrutiny by the PAC. In particular, the Union will focus on the issues of governance and financial management as well as the openness and transparency of the operation of the four Regional Education Consortia in the context of the Welsh Government's *National model for regional working*.¹
4. The NASUWT has been involved in discussions and engagement negotiations with the Consortia since their inception. The Union has had a very mixed experience with the four Consortia and believes that there

¹ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/140217-national-model-for-regional-working-en-v2.pdf>

is still a lack of understanding of the role of the Consortia both within the Consortia themselves and amongst teachers and schools.

5. The NASUWT, as a key stakeholder, has attempted to work closely with the Consortia to ensure that the outcomes of their work are to the benefit of schools and teachers. The Union has sought to initiate true partnership working with the Consortia but has been faced with a lack of understanding of the meaning of partnership. Meetings initially took the form of briefing sessions, with the Consortia simply updating the workforce unions as to their activities.
6. More recently, the NASUWT experience with the Consortia has become more positive, with their role and the role of the workforce unions being better understood.
7. Progress has been made with the Education through Regional Working (ERW) Consortium in west and central Wales and the Central South Consortium (CSC) when discussing model policies on pay, performance management and capability procedures for use across the consortium region.
8. Although the Consortia have responsibility for ensuring the provision of specialist Human Resources (HR) support to schools in accordance with the appendix to the *National model for regional working: revitalising people management in schools* (Welsh Government Guidance document no: 170/2015),² difficulties remain over the Consortia's understanding of the role of local authorities as the employers, and that any model policies, regardless of whether or not agreement has been reached at consortium level must then be subject to the normal local authority protocols and procedures.
9. These processes are less well established and understood in the School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales (GwE) and the Education Achievement Service (EAS) in south-east Wales. In GwE,

² <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/150424-national-model-for-regional-working-en.pdf>

these functions remain with the individual local authorities, whilst in EAS there is a south-east Wales grouping of HR officers that sit alongside the Consortium, with some officers taking a dual role. This has, in some cases, led to confusion and delays over responsibility.

10. Whilst the NASUWT acknowledges that some progress has been made in the engagement with the Consortia over regional working, there remain significant issues regarding the openness, transparency and funding of the Consortia.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

11. The NASUWT has experienced considerable difficulty in finding the minutes and reports of meetings, statements of accounts and dates of board meetings of the Consortia and, although each consortium has its own website, there is no consistency in the reporting of meetings and minutes.

12. The *National Model for Regional Working* states that:

‘Normally notice of meetings of the joint committee will be given on the consortium’s website and the meetings will be open to the public...’³

13. Dates of meetings and agenda items are available for the CSC Joint Education Service but these are found on the Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council (RCT) website and not on the CSC website. These web pages and documents can only be found easily by using external search engines and not from within the RCT website itself. This information is hosted by RCT as the lead authority in the region; similar information regarding CSC cannot be found on any other websites of the other constituent local authorities.

14. Likewise, the information about ERW meetings is hosted on the Pembrokeshire County Council’s website. This is, to some extent, replicated on the City and County of Swansea and the Powys County

³ Ibid

Council websites, but not on those of Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Carmarthenshire County Council and Ceredigion County Council.

15. The EAS website contains minutes of board meetings, statements of accounts and the previous year's business plan but does not include the dates and locations of forthcoming meetings. The company board meetings are not open to the public. Only very limited information regarding EAS can be found on the websites of the constituent local authorities.
16. Information provided by the Welsh Government to the NASUWT in 2014 showed that the budget for the regional consortia should have been as set out in Table 1.
17. The NASUWT has found marked discrepancies between these figures and those reported by the individual consortium. The budget for ERW had been set by the Welsh Government at £5.322 million for 2014-15. However, the statement of accounts for ERW put the contributions from member authorities at £267,000.⁴
18. ERW's business plan for 2017-19 states that the total income from the constituent local authorities amounts to £250,000 and their total funding including Welsh Government grant funding is £500,000. This is at odds with the Wales Audit Office *Memorandum for the Public Accounts Committee – Achieving improvement in support to schools through regional education consortia – a review of progress*, November 2016, which states:

*'...the core budgets for the four consortia in 2014-15 were approximately £18.5 million...'*⁵

⁴ Education through Regional Working Statement of Accounts 2014/2015
https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/objview.asp?object_id=12247&language=

⁵ <https://www.wao.gov.uk/system/files/publications/Reg-education-review-memo-2016-english.pdf>

Table 1**Required local authority minimum contributions for 2014-15, based on the 2014-15 mainstream schools SSA**

Region	Local Authority	SSA Formula 2014-15 Mainstream Schools Sector distribution	Percentage distribution
North Wales	Isle of Anglesey	422,621	2.3%
	Gwynedd	740,733	4.0%
	Conwy	652,994	3.5%
	Denbighshire	623,793	3.4%
	Flintshire	933,484	5.0%
	Wrexham	782,631	4.2%
	Sub total	4,156,256	22.4%
ERW	Powys	786,048	4.2%
	Ceredigion	414,511	2.2%
	Pembrokeshire	759,950	4.1%
	Carmarthenshire	1,141,069	6.2%
	Swansea	1,370,773	7.4%
	Neath Port Talbot	850,288	4.6%
	Sub total	5,322,639	28.7%
Central South	Bridgend	862,092	4.6%
	The Vale of Glamorgan	799,973	4.3%
	Rhondda Cynon Taf	1,531,657	8.3%
	Merthyr Tydfil	359,863	1.9%
	Cardiff	1,917,619	10.3%
	Sub total	5,471,204	29.5%
South East	Caerphilly	1,169,666	6.3%
	Blaenau Gwent	417,511	2.3%
	Torfaen	600,536	3.2%
	Monmouthshire	481,642	2.6%
	Newport	934,254	5.0%
	Sub total	3,603,609	19.4%
Wales		18,553,708	100.0%

19. By contrast, the CSC Budget for 2016-17 sets the local authority contributions at £4.195 million.⁶

20. The Regional Education Consortia also receive grant funding from the Welsh Government. Part of this money can be kept by the Consortia for

⁶ Central South Consortium report for Joint Committee 14th March 2017
<http://www.rctcbc.gov.uk/EN/Council/CouncillorsCommitteesandMeetings/Meetings/CentralSouthConsortiumJointEducationService/2017/03/14/Reports/AgendaItem5ReportoftheTreasurer.pdf>

administrative purposes and to finance their own activities. The remaining amount of money, which represents the large majority, is delegated to schools. However, in none of the reports that the NASUWT has found on any of the Consortia are these amounts broken down with sufficient clarity to provide the whole picture of the funding of the Consortia.

21. As stated previously, the NASUWT has experienced considerable difficulty in accessing the reports and budgets of the Consortia. These are not published by StatsWales in the same way that school budgets and local authority finance is reported. The information is difficult to find, inconsistent and opaque.
22. Over the period of 2013 to 2016 StatsWales has reported the Education revenue expenditure, by authority and service.⁷
23. This shows that the total amount spent by local authorities on school improvement has fallen from £54.137 million in 2013-14 to £44.174 million in 2015-16 (Table 2 below).
24. The changes to individual local authority spends are also marked, with Conwy County Borough Council increasing their spend by 115% whereas the Isle of Anglesey County Council has reduced theirs by 85%.
25. The NASUWT maintains that the changes and variations in spending are very difficult to understand in the context of the work of the Consortia. In particular, the figures for the ERW region do not shed any further light on the funding arrangements in that area. It may be that the comments from the Auditor General for Wales in the June 2015 report, *Achieving improvement in support to schools through regional education consortia*, provides some explanation:

'We found that many local authorities have ceased to have 'head of school improvement' posts during 2011-13 but have since re-instated similar roles to provide the local authority with

⁷ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Local-Government/Finance/Revenue/Education/educationrevenueexpenditure-by-authority-service>

a lead officer to interact with the relevant senior or principal challenge adviser for the consortium.⁸

Table 2

Education revenue expenditure, by authority and service 2013-2016

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2013 to 2016	
Local Authorities	Total School improvement	Total School improvement	Total School improvement	Change	% Change
	£ ,000s	£ ,000s	£ ,000s	£ ,000s	
Isle of Anglesey	1318	1066	202	-1116	-85
Gwynedd	1596	2444	1296	-300	-19
Conwy	626	1409	1348	722	115
Denbighshire	2713	2558	2763	50	2
Flintshire	3360	2243	2625	-735	-22
Wrexham	967	1553	1762	795	82
GwE Total	10580	11274	9996	-584	-6
Powys	5217	5442	2225	-2992	-57
Ceredigion	3184	2892	2033	-1151	-36
Pembrokeshire	1086	1255	1344	258	24
Carmarthenshire	3372	3247	1988	-1384	-41
Swansea	2970	2026	2242	-728	-25
Neath Port Talbot	7251	7921	8353	1103	15
ERW Total	23079	22783	18186	-4893	-21
Bridgend	1307	1128	1092	-215	-16
Vale of Glamorgan	913	1458	942	29	3
Rhondda Cynon Taf	3012	3145	3031	19	1
Merthyr Tydfil	973	97	458	-515	-53
Cardiff	2723	2286	2002	-721	-26
CSC Total	8929	8114	7525	-1404	-16
Caerphilly	6615	6381	5179	-1436	-22
Blaenau Gwent	1382	960	685	-697	-50
Torfaen	1135	995	680	-455	-40
Monmouthshire	1350	1095	1086	-264	-20
Newport	1067	936	837	-230	-22
EAS Total	11550	10367	8467	-3082	-27
Total Unitary Authorities	54137	52537	44174	-9963	-18

⁸https://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/regional_education_consortia_report_english.pdf

26. The NASUWT firmly believes that much more needs to be done to improve the openness and transparency of the workings of Regional Education Consortia and that lessons must be learnt before this model is extended to other local authority services.
27. The NASUWT does not accept the assertion of the Welsh Ministers that the Regional Education Consortia model presents a good example of collaborative working between local authorities.



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