

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 34

**Ymateb gan: Undeb Addysg Cenedlaethol Cymru
Response from: National Education Union Cymru**

About National Education Union Cymru:

- The National Education Union Cymru stands up for the future of education. It brings together the voices of teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders working in maintained and independent schools and colleges to form the largest education union in Wales.
- The National Education Union is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) and Education International (EI). It is not affiliated to any political party and seeks to work constructively with all the main political parties.
- Together, we'll shape the future of education.

Our response

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and would welcome the opportunity to supplement this response with oral evidence.

In previous responses to the Committee about funding we have set out that school funding is facing unprecedented pressure and that our members have grave concerns about school funding.

We cannot reiterate enough that the schools sector is in need of additional support.

Reductions in funding will inevitably lead to teacher and support staff redundancies, diminution of resources generally, increase class sizes and consequently teachers' workload and stress levels. This will exacerbate problems with teacher recruitment and retention. The inevitable impact of this will be on our children and young people – a situation which no one in Wales wants.

Transparency

A lack of transparency of both Welsh Government spending, but also the amount of money each Local Authority puts into school budgets from the Revenue Support Grant. This lack of transparency has consistently resulted in a post code lottery when applying the different funding formulas currently in operation across Wales. It is not unusual to see a school being funded on a per pupil basis significant sums less than another similar sized school elsewhere.

The new Curriculum, Additional Learning Needs and other reforms in 'Our National Mission', have serious system wide cost implications if they are to be implemented in a way which will meet the expectations not only of the WG, but of teachers, support staff, parents and children across Wales. Reforms have generally been welcomed by education professionals, but inadequate resourcing will have significant implications upon the success, or otherwise, of such reforms.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) recently suggested that school funding in England was dropping at a faster rate in England (8%) than in Wales (5%).¹

Whilst we would disagree with the IFS findings on the amount of money spent in England and Wales in terms of a funding gap, the findings do reflect the chronic underfunding of the Welsh education system, which must be reversed if we are to achieve the aims of the WG set out in 'Our National Mission'.

The WG itself published figures in 2010 which suggested the funding gap was at least £604². We believe the current likely funding gap is larger than IFS suggest and probably well in excess of that 2010 figure.

Welsh Government Budget

We know that WG has been hit by austerity. In a recent statement, Finance Minister Mark Drakeford said: "the Welsh Government's budget will remain 5% lower in real terms in 2019-20 than it was in 2010-11, equivalent to £850m less to spend on public services."

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<https://www.ifs.org.uk/uploads/Comparing%20schools%20spending%20per%20pupil%20in%20Wales%20and%20England.pdf>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-12280492>

However, WG face real choices about how they spend the money which is allocated to them.

In her letter to CYPE Committee³, the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams AM, says that ‘prevention’ ‘of problems arising in the future’ is key to her education spending plans, and sets out how she is meeting her priorities.

However the WLGA disagree with how she has allocated her budget.

In evidence to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee in October⁴, the WLGA were very strong on what they thought about WG budget allocations. They particularly noted that the £24 million over 2 years, which the Education Secretary plans to spend on professional learning should go directly into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). They believe that spending on teachers’ professional learning “exacerbates the way that the impact of these cuts will divert remaining resources away directly from the classroom”.

However, we would disagree with this position, and believe ensuring sufficient money is available for professional development is a critical matter which we would not want to see disappearing into the RSG. We believe this money needs to go straight to the schools.

If WG is serious about delivering its reform agenda, including both the Curriculum and ALN changes, this money must be committed every year and support individual education professionals in continuing professional development.

There are wider implications for funding too. Adult and Community Learning has received significant cuts⁵, with the EHRC finding: “Engagement in lifelong learning (education courses or job-related

³ <http://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s80172/CYPE5-30-18%20-%20Paper%201%20-%20Welsh%20Government.pdf>

⁴ <http://record.assembly.wales/Committee/5166>

⁵ <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-02/review-of-the-operation-of-the-further-and-higher%20-education-governance-and-information-wales-act-2014.pdf>

training) has declined since 2013/14, including among younger people aged 25–34.”

Child poverty

We are particularly concerned about the how wider austerity is impacting on schools ability to provide the best possible education to children in Wales. The benefit changes imposed by the Westminster Government have an impact on children and young people in Wales.

A recent Bevan Foundation Report⁶ had some stark figures for Wales on Child Poverty. With ‘approximately 180,000 children’ in Wales living in poverty, we believe it is critical that WG does not leave schools to fill gaps left by cuts to other services. We would agree with the recent statement made by the Chief inspector of schools in England:

““cannot be a panacea” for all social ills and will criticise some parents for neglecting some of the “most basic of parenting tasks”, such as toilet training.”⁷

This is supported by comments from our members about the notable change in terms of children’s ‘readiness’ for school.

However, we note that the change has come about since the UK Government’s introduction of austerity. We would therefore raise concerns about the reduction of services for the early years, such as ‘team around the family’, which our members suggest is having a huge impact on their ability to teach.

We are concerned by another Bevan Foundation’s report which says that Wales will have a less generous free school meals policy than England from 2019⁸. We have particular concerns about eligibility for free school meals – including the use of ‘eFSM’ and not using the ‘Ever 6’, which are set out below.

Pupil Development Grant Eligibility

⁶ <https://41ydvd1cuyvlonsm03mpf21pub-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SoW-Poverty-Oct-18-final.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/dec/02/schools-parents-ofsted-knife-crime-obesity>

⁸ <https://41ydvd1cuyvlonsm03mpf21pub-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/UC-report-final.pdf>

Whilst many believed that those eligible for free school meals (eFSM) included all of those children and young people whose parents could apply for FSM this is not the case. In reality eFSM is all those who had applied for FSM. Therefore FSM and eFSM are virtually the same.

We are therefore concerned that the allocation of the Pupil Development Grant is not based on those children who are eligible through their circumstances, but eligible through the schools ability to obtain consent for the child to have free school meals.

We believe there should be consistency in how local authorities assess access to FSM – which should use the Ever 6 model, which has been used in England.⁹ This allows for parents to apply for FSM once, which is then counted for 6 years – and allows schools to plan their interventions appropriately.

As the UK Government’s Eligibility says:

“The pupil premium for 2017 to 2018 will include pupils recorded in the January 2017 school census who are known to have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) since May 2011, as well as those first known to be eligible at January 2017.”

We believe that should this be implemented in Wales it could have an impact on schools funding, and help to mitigate some of the negative impacts of austerity, which Wales is experiencing.

If we’re serious about ‘prevention’ and the Wellbeing of Future Generations, school funding is critical.

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⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2017-to-2018/pupil-premium-conditions-of-grant-2017-to-2018#eligibility>