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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

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Jayne Bryant MS
Chair
Children, Young People and Education Committee

27 April 2023

Dear Jayne

Please find enclosed two evidence papers to support the Committee's ongoing inquiry into implementation of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform.

The CfW paper outlines progress on curriculum reform and specific support arrangements in place for schools and settings. It also draws on the first wave of "[early insights](#)" research being published today, which I believe the Committee will be interested in.

I look forward to attending the Committee again on 10 May.

Yours sincerely

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Welsh Government Evidence Paper – CYPE Committee

10 May 2023

Curriculum for Wales (CfW) implementation

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As signalled in our [annual report on curriculum implementation](#) in 2022, we are undertaking research during the 2022/23 academic year to maintain an up to-date understanding of schools' and learners' initial experiences of Curriculum for Wales (CfW). This is being undertaken in two waves; the first "[early insights](#)" [report was published](#) on 27 April. It presents qualitative findings from 64 senior leader interviews in primary, secondary, and special schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)¹. Further information on monitoring and evaluation is at section 4.
- 1.2 Close working with Estyn, regional consortia, partnerships and local authorities regarding curriculum implementation includes regular feedback on progress being made by schools and settings and matters arising. Estyn published related information in their [Annual Report](#). We also supplement this information with practitioner engagement through the [National Network](#), and the work of support programmes, such as [Camau I'r Dyfodol](#).
- 1.3 This paper, therefore, draws on a range of sources while providing links to published evidence and information (where possible). This includes [Audit Wales' report](#) on curriculum implementation and the [government's response](#).
- 1.4 This paper is to inform Members' considerations in advance of the fuller 2023 annual report on curriculum implementation, scheduled for 3 July.

2. Progress on curriculum reform

Overview

- 2.1 All settings, primary schools and around half of secondary schools are currently operating under the CfW Framework, and we are two academic terms into what is recognised as a long-term process of curriculum realisation. The CfW emphasises the importance of schools and settings continuing to trial, evaluate and improve their curricula as part of the continuing improvement journey.
- 2.2 Some 530 non-maintained childcare nursery settings ("settings") are registered and funded for foundation learning under the CfW, which serves approximately 10,000 3-4 year olds. Regarding implementation, there is a greater sense of momentum with settings, and all local authorities are implementing plans to

¹ There is a risk of selection bias among the school sample engaged with the research. Those that progressed further than others in their activities may have been more likely to agree to take part in the interviews.

improve CfW understanding. However, this sense of motivation and urgency can at times, depending on the circumstances, be either invigorating or overwhelming. While progress and improvement are essential, we also recognise this is not a linear journey. Across settings there remains a clear sense of determination to create high-quality, developmental opportunities for learners accessing childcare and education in the non-maintained sector and we remain confident that progress is happening in a sustainable way.

- 2.3 For schools, Estyn notes challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including limiting opportunities for practitioners to design curricula and collaborate with others, has meant that progress was variable. More recent early insights research also shows variation in the pace of progress. Those that have been planning for three or four years are more confident than those who felt they were at an earlier stage of implementation. Similarly, faster progress is being made in some parts of the curriculum than others.
- 2.4 Despite this, the evidence does indicate tangible progress across Wales including examples of exciting practice. Senior leaders report broad contentment with the progress their school is making. They report feelings of confidence in, and ownership of, CfW design and delivery is rising in practitioners. It is encouraging that early feedback flags an increased focus on pedagogy and on greater levels of collaboration within and across schools as a consequence of these reforms. The early insights research also found a greater sense of practitioner autonomy emerging among school staff as practitioners increasingly take responsibility and ownership of curriculum implementation. There appears to be growing recognition that the nature of curriculum reform is a longer-term process, rather than a once and done event.
- 2.5 Nearly all schools and settings that have adopted CfW have met the requirement to publish a curriculum summary. Support is being provided to those still to do so. In parallel, we are publishing a co-constructed toolkit resource on curriculum summaries for funded nursery settings.
- 2.6 While progress is being made by schools and settings developing and implementing approaches, there remain areas of ongoing focus. These are explored further below.

Primary and secondary clusters and collaboration

- 2.7 From research findings, we get a sense that schools are well on their development journey. They are increasingly working together in clusters to support curriculum approaches. Cluster work between primary and secondary schools is being used to support planning for progression; to ensure continuity in curriculum planning; to develop a shared understanding of progression, including how it should be articulated. The cluster working approach seems to have played an important role in helping schools to develop joint approaches and allay uncertainty previously felt by schools. Cluster working is an important requirement for successful and consistent curriculum realisation across Wales, so this is an important step.
- 2.8 While schools recognise cluster working is important and valuable, there are ongoing challenges. Staff capacity to collaborate remains a challenge for school

leaders, and cluster collaboration is still at an early stage, focusing on specific elements of CfW (e.g. RSE). Collaborative work appears stronger in some curriculum Areas than others, and there remains a need for ongoing emphasis to develop a shared understanding of progression both within and across schools.

Shared Understanding of progression

- 2.9 A shared understanding of progression is integral to curriculum design and to support every learner to progress. In practice this means schools working internally and with other schools to understand joint expectations for how learners should progress and how knowledge, skills and experiences contribute to this; to support coherent progression for learners throughout their journey and particularly at transition points; and to ensure sufficient pace and challenge in their expectations of learners. Schools are required to have arrangements in place to develop and maintain a shared understanding of progression and to outline the details in a plan.
- 2.10 School and setting leaders are best placed to develop the most appropriate arrangements to ensure ongoing opportunities for practitioners to compare their thinking to other schools and settings, allowing practitioners to reflect on their understanding of progression and for schools and settings to have consistent expectations. We are aware of challenges sometimes faced by releasing practitioners to hold this professional dialogue about progression. We advise schools build on existing structures and relationships (e.g. regular in-school staff / departmental / cross-department meetings; and clusters / networks between schools).
- 2.11 We are working with regional consortia, partnerships and local authorities this term to gain assurance on the arrangements and plans schools and settings have put in place, and what further support they may need in meeting these requirements. We will provide a fuller update in the CfW annual report in July.

Progression and assessment

- 2.12 The early insights research found senior leaders developing progression plans across curriculum Areas, incorporating mandatory principles of progression into curriculum design to ensure learners increase their breadth and depth of knowledge, consolidate and deepen understanding, and make connections and apply learning in different contexts. They recognise the greater emphasis on the progress made by the individual learner as part of their thinking and planning in relation to progression. Senior leaders also recognised that new approaches to learner progression require a change in practitioner mindset, which is likely to take some time to embed.
- 2.13 The research also shows that schools are changing how they share information on progress with parents and carers, and senior leaders reported a welcome shift towards more personalised contact with them regarding individual learners.
- 2.14 Schools also noted some challenges, with a risk being flagged by primary leaders that variation in approaches to progression could contribute to a 'fragmented' system where schools pulled in different directions. While the

research acknowledged that schools were working in clusters to ensure consistency, time required for this could detract from other activity. In secondaries, leaders expressed concern about how to ensure approaches to progression (and assessment) meet accountability and statutory requirements. There was some sense that curriculum progression steps were being misunderstood by practitioners viewing them as a 'framework for assessment'. In some schools, there is reticence among practitioners to move from existing means of tracking learner progress, for example the continued use of the old National Curriculum levels, as well as how this information on learners' progress is then reported to parents.

- 2.15 Linked to work on developing learner progression, and as highlighted in the curriculum Annual Report last year, supporting the profession's understanding and confidence about assessment continues to be a priority of our ongoing work to support successful implementation. We have been working with regional consortia and partnership colleagues throughout the year to embed the assessment resources, developed last summer, into their assessment support offer, promoting and supporting their use, ensuring they are valuable for schools and practitioners. We have also been working with the academic lead responsible for the CAMAU Assessing for the Future workshops to look at the feedback obtained during the development of the workshops to identify further areas where specific support could be targeted.
- 2.16 The new framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability, published in June 2022, makes clear that assessment "should not be undertaken for accountability purposes" but instead, the rich information obtained from assessment should underpin self-evaluation and improvement practices within schools, to drive higher standards.
- 2.17 Estyn's 2022 report on [Effective approaches to assessment that improve teaching and learning](#) reviewed how maintained primary, secondary, all-age and special schools developed effective approaches to assessment that improve learning and teaching. The report supports the fundamental principles of assessment within CfW, highlighting good practice in many schools and acknowledging the critical role of assessment in supporting learner progression.
- 2.18 Early insights research found new approaches to assessment in development, with increased focus on formative, day-by-day assessment. Both primary and secondary leaders reported a deliberate shift towards assessment for learning and embedding it among all staff. Many noted that they have been aware of the value of assessment for learning, but that the CfW had been a catalyst in bringing about change.
- 2.19 Research also highlights reductions in the volume of formal assessment during the year, though schools continue to use national personalised assessments to gauge reading and numeracy progress. Some senior leaders emphasised their continued importance in benchmarking learner attainment. In other cases, personalised assessments are used to map what has / has not been covered sufficiently, rather than to understand standards or learner levels. This reflects a welcome shift expressed by a number of primary and secondary schools to using assessment information to support and improve curriculum planning.

Space and time

2.20 A common, continuing challenge is ensuring that staff have the space and time needed to engage with the process of curriculum design, and to collaborate within and across schools on approaches. The early insights research notes that releasing staff to attend sessions, arranging cover, and adequate access to funding were mentioned by senior leaders as part of this issue.

Learning from those further along

2.21 Estyn report that in primary schools, experience of foundation learning pedagogy and a more established approach to applying skills in a cross-curricular way has supported teachers to start to adapt their pedagogy and deliver more authentic learning experiences. In secondary schools making suitable progress, they focus on improving teaching, developing staff understanding of curriculum and progression in learning, and carefully consider their approach to transition between primary and secondary.

2.22 In the best cases, Estyn note practitioners have reflected well on the impact of their approaches on learner progress. Such schools are also increasingly engaging more purposefully with national and international research and adapting ideas to suit their own context. In terms of curriculum design, in the best cases leaders have ensured a first focus on developing a collaborative vision for their curriculum based on learner, parental, staff, and community engagement.

Managing curriculum and additional learning needs (ALN) reforms

2.23 The optimum learning environment, that is quality learning and teaching that starts with the needs of the learner, is fundamental to both the CfW and to ALN reform. Progression in learning is for all learners, including those with ALN, so all can develop in the ways described in the curriculum's [four purposes](#).

2.24 Curriculum and ALN officials have convened a practitioner group on the specific challenges and opportunities presented by concurrent introduction of CfW and ALN reform. The group is considering additional support, as well as sharing experiences from their schools, settings, clusters and networks.

2.25 They have highlighted issues around parental understanding which, in some cases, has increased the number of meetings between ALNCOs and parents and carers of children with ALN. Another frustration is that ALN is sometimes considered the responsibility of ALNCOs rather than of every practitioner. Funding is also a concern for some members of the group that have noted the need for adequate funding for both universally available provision and to support learners with ALN, and that this needs to reflect the context of the individual school or setting.

2.26 The early insights research highlights both opportunities and challenges faced by practitioners in relation to equity and curriculum reform. Senior leaders note that equity has always been an important focus but there is now a more learner-centred approach to curriculum design and monitoring learner progression, with the flexibility to tailor support. The increased focus on learner voice contributing

to developing curricula that are learner-centred and inclusive. Also noted is a change in learning content to be more diverse and to better reflect our society. There nevertheless remains concern about gaps in attainment exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic.

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE)

2.27 Following the 2022 judicial review of the RSE Code and guidance, where the judge emphatically ruled in favour of the Welsh Government, schools have in general reported a very stable picture: they are beginning to realise the Code while developing approaches to aspects they are less confident in. The judgment was a very clear affirmation of our approach for schools to take confidence in. In particular: the judge said:

“There is nothing in the Code or the Guidance that authorises or positively approves teaching that advocates or promotes any particular identity or sexual lifestyle over another, or that encourages children to self-identify in a particular way.

“...In my judgment, both the Code and the Guidance reflect the general spirit of the (European Convention of Human Rights) as an instrument designed to maintain and promote the ideals and values of a modern liberal democracy, including the values of tolerance, respect and equality.”

2.28 Many schools have not reported concerns about RSE from parents and carers. Where they were reported prior to the judicial review, the situation is now far more settled. We continue to work closely with local authorities to monitor the situation and to support specific clusters where there are strongly held concerns among the community.

2.29 We have been very clear to schools that within the context of their legal duties, they should take the time to get their approach right: planning aspects that they are less comfortable with and selecting resources and sharing these in advance with parents and carers. We have encouraged them to speak to regional consortia and partnerships on resources. Schools should not use resources or teach something they are not confident is developmentally appropriate. Schools appear generally very clear in understanding the importance of early, pro-active communication.

2.30 We have supported this through a range of materials aimed at parents, carers and wider communities that help dispel some of the misconceptions about RSE and have worked with local authorities to help schools respond to concerns raised. We continue to work with communities to help them understand the RSE ethos and requirements and to dispel misconceptions that have arisen due to misinformation.

2.31 Practitioner confidence and support for provision remain important challenges. Our approach includes professional learning as well as the systematic review of all bilingual resources and supporting materials on our Hwb education platform. For RSE this includes officials, practitioners and related experts collaborating on a detailed review of each RSE related resource on Hwb. We are keen to provide assurance to schools and settings that all materials in the CfW resources section on Hwb are fully aligned to CfW requirements, including the RSE Code.

Religion values and ethics (RVE)

- 2.32 Progress in the planning, learning and teaching of RVE under CfW across all schools is progressing well, with all 22 local authorities having developed a new Agreed Syllabus aligned to CfW.
- 2.33 To further support schools of a religious character, we funded the Catholic Education Service and the Church in Wales to prepare supporting curriculum materials for their schools, linking denominational religious education and the CfW. This is helping ensure they have a clear understanding of how learning and teaching through the CfW can reflect the needs of their learners and the communities they serve. To support schools on RVE we have also been working with colleagues from WASACRE and practitioners to develop CfW professional learning resources linked to the changes in RVE. There will be 11/12 modules in total.

Welsh Language

- 2.34 The Welsh language framework to provide further support to English-medium schools and settings was published in October 2022. It sets out the statutory requirements for Welsh, as well as setting out the experiences, knowledge, skills and dispositions implicit in the CfW. It also signposts where further information and support can be found.
- 2.35 Regional consortia and partnerships across Wales are supporting schools with their CfW Welsh language provision and are working collaboratively to develop a national professional learning programme. However further work is needed to develop materials. Wider work that contributes to the sector's understanding of Welsh as part of curriculum requirements includes the work of the [National Network](#) and a resource to support leaders to evaluate their progress in developing Welsh in their school was recently published.
- 2.36 Estyn will be undertaking a thematic review on Developing Pupils' Welsh Reading Skills which will inform future support, alongside the findings from school leaders and learners arising from wave two of the early insights research work underway this term.

Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE)

- 2.37 CWRE is a cross-cutting CfW theme for learners aged 3 to 16. When designing their curriculum, schools must ensure that CWRE is considered across the breadth of learning and within each of the six curriculum Areas. Learners should gain experiences related to work and careers, and develop knowledge of the breadth of opportunities available to them throughout their lives.
- 2.38 Careers Wales facilitates a range of employer activities and information events for learners. They bring together schools and employers with the aim of informing, inspiring and motivating young people about their career opportunities. Together they help them understand how subject choices impact future career options, the evolving world of work, career options and how to take their next

steps and future options. The Education Business Exchange is a Careers Wales facilitated database that lists employers and alumni from a variety of sectors who are interested in working with schools to develop exciting curriculum enhancing programmes for learners and highlights the range of different ways employers and alumni can work with schools and learners to showcase the world of work.

- 2.39 CWRE is one of the themes being explicitly explored through wave two of the early insights research work underway this term. The resulting report providing further information on its implementation is scheduled for publication in September.

3. Managing curriculum reform

- 3.1 In addition to the more specific support arrangements noted in the previous section, reforms involve a range of approaches designed to aid the process of ongoing CfW implementation. Fuller information will be included in the next annual report in July.

Professional Learning

- 3.2 For settings, we support local authorities and setting staff in effective curriculum implementation arrangements through [professional learning modules to support foundation learning in schools and settings](#).
- 3.3 For schools, developing a high-quality education profession supported through professional learning remains central to the realisation of our vision for education. The National Professional Learning Entitlement (NPLE), launched in September 2022, is key to ensuring all practitioners have access to quality professional learning to enable high standards and aspirations for all.
- 3.4 With nearly £36 million invested in the delivery of professional learning opportunities for education practitioners during 2023-24 alone, the national professional learning offer is wide and varied. This includes £12 million being allocated directly to schools, which builds on the £55 million in the professional learning grant awarded over the last five years. This funding allows time and space for practitioners and leaders to work together across schools and networks to realise the CfW. In line with the NPLE, the main purpose of this funding is to enable all practitioners to develop their skills and practice to deliver high quality learning and teaching.
- 3.5 The remainder of professional learning funding during 2023-24 includes the delivery of a national CfW Development Programme, via education consortia and partnerships. Schools already implementing the CfW are also accessing more bespoke regional support to facilitate curriculum realisation.
- 3.6 We are also continuing to work with a range of other partners and experts to develop professional learning resources to further support practitioners to realise CfW requirements. Current partners include the BAME Ed (Wales) Network at Cardiff Metropolitan University who are developing and delivering Diversity and

Anti-Racism Professional Learning (DARPL). Work is also ongoing with a range of other stakeholders to support education practitioners in the following areas:

- RSE
- UNCRC/UNCRPD
- Literacy and oracy
- Citizenship and political learning
- Peer to Peer online sexual harassment training pilot.

- 3.7 The suite of new resources is being released in a phased approach and range from ‘awareness raising’ to ‘aspiring for excellence’ to further support practitioners’ high-quality learning and teaching.
- 3.8 To support the introduction and implementation of the NPLE and other national priorities, we have recently laid Regulations to continue the additional INSET day per year for the next three academic years. The additional INSET day will be dedicated to CfW professional learning, supporting learners with additional learning needs and embedding equity, well-being and the Welsh language across the whole-school community.
- 3.9 We know it takes time for professional learning to impact learning and teaching in the classroom and learner outcomes. In taking forward the Audit Wales recommendation, we are working with education consortia and partnerships on an agreed approach to measuring the impact of professional learning over the short, medium and long-term. Also, as outlined in the NPLE, we are developing a national approach to recognising high quality professional learning, and further detail will be published on this before the end of the summer term.

Funding

- 3.10 In line with Audit Wales’ recommendations and Ministerial commitments made under the last Senedd, we are publishing information on directly attributable funding for curriculum realisation in annual reports, the next of which will be available in July 2023. This will include revised three-year projections, as well as reporting previous financial years’ outturn positions. Our approach to financial reporting has been designed to avoid any additional burden on schools.
- 3.11 Alongside the 2023-24 funding for professional learning set out above, our budget plans for the year ahead for curriculum implementation remain broadly in line with the 2022-23 provision. This includes funding for schools.
- 3.12 As set out in the [Regulatory Impact Assessment](#) for the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021, directly attributable costs for curriculum reform are expected to reduce year on year as the curriculum rolls out. However, these pre-pandemic estimates need to be considered in the light of experiences. We will, therefore, look closely at funding for schools’ curriculum reform as part of the next budget round, and in the light of the broader position on school funding.

School improvement

- 3.13 We have been clear that we need to ensure that all aspects of the education system are aligned with and fully support CfW realisation. In June 2022, we

published [school improvement guidance](#) to introduce a new way for the education system to work together to support schools in their improvement, build confidence in the system and retain a clear focus on supporting all learners to progress through their education. This school improvement guidance set out eight contributory factors to support effective curriculum realisation in schools: these provide a consistent policy framework for all schools and school improvement services to ensure that learners and learning remain at the centre of our education reform.

- 3.14 Estyn has a key role to play in supporting this vision. Estyn’s new approach to inspection includes a move away from summative judgements in inspection reports to focus more on strengths and areas for improvement. There is also greater flexibility in the framework to consider the context of each school or setting. Professional dialogue is at the heart of the inspection process.
- 3.15 In their annual report Estyn stated that regional consortia and local authorities not in a consortium “*developed suitable approaches to support schools to develop their curriculum*” and began to develop stronger approaches to supporting primary and secondary collaboration. Estyn have also noted that too often this support was not bespoke enough to meet needs and provision was not evaluated effectively enough. There is also some indication that ‘action short of a strike’ in some schools has meant they have not drawn on the same level of school improvement services’ support than would otherwise be expected.
- 3.16 Senior leaders recognised in early insights research that school improvement services provide a range of support to schools (e.g. regular network meetings for assessment and progression leads; materials to help schools develop approaches to map progression and attainment; access to expert speakers and advisers to support curriculum planning). Senior leaders reported that schools value the support provided through clusters and networks. And some felt that, as curriculum plans are further developed and implemented, there is a need for greater external constructive challenge. We understand that some primary schools are of the view that regional guidance and support on progression remains too abstract and not supportive of schools’ plans.
- 3.17 In addition to the professional learning set out above, consortia and partnerships are tasked to deliver a range of support to schools on curriculum reform. This approach is aligned with the development phases set out in the ‘[journey to curriculum rollout](#)’ section of CfW guidance. A key priority for all consortia and partnerships is to support collaboration and this is explicit in grant funding terms. They are also specifically tasked to support school engagement in National Network conversations and the Camau I’r Dyfodol project, as well as the provision of bespoke support to those secondary schools adopting CfW in September 2023. Other aspects of their 2023-24 priorities include: supporting the development of a shared understanding of progression within and between cluster schools; supporting the development and sharing of purposeful assessment practices; and supporting all schools to develop their self-evaluation process in line with school improvement guidance – this to support the evaluation of impact from the first year of CfW implementation.

Supporting progression and assessment in schools

- 3.18 The 3 year Camau l'r Dyfodol project is working with practitioners, senior leaders and representatives from across the education system to build capacity in designing progression in curricula. The project's first phase findings, gauging the system's understanding of progression and providing issues for schools to work through, were set out in a resource distributed at the Headteachers conference on 23 March. The full phase one report will be published this term. The second phase is now underway and focusses on co-constructing resources, practical examples, and other supporting materials on progression.
- 3.19 We continue to deliver National Network conversations bringing practitioners together to share approaches to progression and to inform our support for schools. Supporting resources, videos, and question packs are available to practitioners to support them to workshop issues in their own settings.
- 3.20 All schools continue to have access to the [CAMAU Assessing for the Future Workshops](#): a series of workshops developed with practitioners to support assessment practice capacity-building. The workshops help develop approaches to assessment that build progression in learning rather than just prove current learning. And, following on from the series of [supporting materials for curriculum, assessment, and evaluating learner progress](#) (June 2022) we have continued to add to these resources this academic year, publishing a number of case studies on approaches to curriculum design, transition, assessment and progression. We will publish further practical support arising from Camau l'r Dyfodol in the autumn.

Curriculum adoption in September 2023

- 3.21 Secondary schools were given the option to roll out the CfW in September 2023 for years 7 and 8 together. In total, 104 secondary providers adopted from September 2022, nearly half of those eligible. These comprised 4 PRUs and 100 maintained schools.
- 3.22 There were no notable patterns in terms of the location of schools or settings or social disadvantage, with a spread across Wales broadly in line with population densities. Schools in Flintshire, Isle of Anglesey and Wrexham decided to wait until 2023 as we understand head teachers locally wanted to move forward collectively, while making use of the time available for engagement work, trialling and evaluation.
- 3.23 Nearly all are accessing bespoke regional / local support. Guidance on curriculum expectations is supporting strategic planning. Most are reviewing their vision, values and behaviours and have engaged well with staff to develop this across their school, with wider stakeholder engagement planned. Most school leaders display sound understanding of the CfW Framework and its design considerations and have identified a range of professional learning opportunities to continue to develop a clear and shared understanding of effective pedagogy, the principles of progression and formative and summative assessment.

3.24 Wave two of the early insights resource underway this term includes discussions with senior leaders from several secondary schools that chose not to adopt the CfW framework last September. This part of the research is to understand their progress and confidence to implement from September 2023, and understand the ways in which these schools have been preparing.

“Off-the-shelf” packages and resources

3.25 We know some schools use external tools to support assessment arrangements. We are also aware that others have stopped using them recognising that generic tools were not necessarily aligned with the progression plans and assessment arrangements they were taking forward, or were not sufficiently bespoke to support the school’s curriculum vision. As noted above, supporting schools to evolve their assessment arrangements remains a priority across the system.

3.26 For RSE resources are being bought and used in some cases in schools where there are elements the school wants further reassurance on what they are teaching, or where they are not fully confident in designing their own approaches. RSE (though mainly in primary schools, rather than secondaries) is an example where schools are in some cases relying on lesson packages. However, as the review of Hwb resources develops, we expect schools to be in a stronger position to have confidence in a suite of bilingual and freely available tools to support their learning and teaching.

3.27 In addition, there are tools in use by schools for the purpose of tracking learners’ progress. However, again there is evidence that schools are moving away from these as they develop their own bespoke approaches, including the use of learning journals or portfolios to evidence progression.

New qualifications

3.28 On 20 March I issued a [written statement](#) on the 14-16 curriculum offer and qualifications. The statement set out our vision for the learning that 14-16 year olds will benefit from under the Curriculum for Wales, and the important role of qualifications within that. We want schools’ curriculum offers to ensure learners leave compulsory education with the knowledge, skills and experiences they need to succeed on their individual pathways, as they progress towards the four purposes; and for their achievements and progression to be recognised.

3.29 Through the Qualified for the Future programme, Qualifications Wales is continuing to develop new qualifications that support the CfW. This includes made-for-Wales GCSEs and other qualifications, ranging from entry level to level 2 across a wide range of subjects, that make up the full 14 – 16 qualifications offer. Their aim is to create an inclusive menu of bilingual qualifications for schools and learners to choose from that make the most of digital technology while commanding public confidence in Wales, the UK and globally. Reformed qualifications will continue to play a crucial role in supporting learners to progress to their next steps in education, employment or training, based on their individual pathways and aspirations.

- 3.30 Qualifications Wales are now refining proposals and finalising approval criteria to hand over to the WJEC in June. The WJEC will then take forward the development and design of the new qualifications. The programme remains on track for first teaching to commence for existing, reformed subjects in September 2025 with first awards in summer 2027.
- 3.31 In line with the Audit Wales recommendation, WJEC will play an important role in helping to prepare and support schools during 2024 and 2025. Planning for the development and delivery of bilingual resources and professional learning, to support the teaching of the new qualifications, is already underway.

CfW framework guidance updates

- 3.32 In line with our response to the Audit Wales recommendation, we set out in our 2022 curriculum annual report our approach to annual review and updating of the CfW framework guidance. We will also use the 2023 reporting cycle in July to draw out key issues from the review process, and provide stakeholders advance notice of issues under consideration, in advance of January guidance updates.

4. Evaluation and monitoring

- 4.1 In July 2022, the Welsh Government published the Government's Social Research (GSR) report [Scoping study for the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms in Wales](#), which presented findings of a scoping study relating to the evaluation of the curriculum and assessment reforms. It set out key questions to be answered when assessing how the reforms are working and to examine the extent to which they are having the desired impact for all learners. It assessed the usefulness of existing data sources to answer these questions and proposed additional studies to fill gaps in existing data.
- 4.2 We considered the recommended studies against available resources and will publish an evaluation plan this summer setting out our proposed programme of research and evaluation activity. An update on this will also be included in the next Annual Report for curriculum implementation on 3 July, for completeness.
- 4.3 In parallel, two key studies within the evaluation programme are in development, the *national sample-based monitoring programme* and the *formative evaluation*.

National sample-based monitoring programme

- 4.4 In line with [Successful Futures](#), and as confirmed in our [Written Statement](#) of 19 January, we are embarked on an ambitious programme of national monitoring of learners' achievement. This involves a rolling programme of assessments of samples of learners across Wales to build a picture of learners' attainment and progress over time.
- 4.5 Importantly, by using a national sample of learners across Wales, we minimise burdens on schools and the education system while providing the information we need to understand how the CfW is supporting learners and raising standards, and our progress in tackling the impact of poverty on learners' achievement.

- 4.6 This is not about testing every learner but understanding the national picture of learners' attainment and progress over time. This is needed to support national improvement in education in a way that is compatible with the CfW and preserves schools' autonomy and agency in curriculum design. It will not be linked to school performance measures.
- 4.7 Development work for this programme is underway, and we expect to begin rolling these assessments out on a pilot basis in the academic year 2025/26.

Formative evaluation and deep-dives

- 4.8 We are planning to commission a multi-year full formative evaluation which would commence in autumn 2023. This would include research with practitioners, learners and their families, to understand how the reforms are being experienced by key stakeholder groups.
- 4.9 This approach would aim to achieve sufficient sample sizes to allow us to investigate the experiences of different groups of learners, so that we can assess the extent to which the reforms are working for all learners irrespective of their background or ability. We are working to ensure that research and evaluation activity related to the curriculum and ALN reforms is aligned and integrated where appropriate to provide a holistic picture, reduce burden on research participants and make best use of resources.
- 4.10 We also plan to embed deep dives in a number of aspects of the curriculum to allow for a more detailed understanding of specific areas, as well as across the breadth of the reforms. These are likely to change between waves of the research to maximise coverage of topics.
- 4.11 We are considering how data from the formative evaluation, specifically research with schools, can be anonymously linked to the national sample-based monitoring data so that that attainment outcomes can be understood against the background of different contexts and practices within schools.

Research on early implementation

- 4.12 As noted at start of this paper, we are undertaking initial research on the early stages of curriculum implementation in two waves during the 2022/23 academic year. The wave one report (27 April) presents findings of 64 interviews with senior leaders in primary, secondary, and special schools and PRUs from November 2022 to January 2023. It follows our previous research report, *Qualitative research with practitioners on preparations for curriculum and assessment reforms* (January 2022).
- 4.13 The purpose of the interviews was to explore senior leaders' views and early experiences of CfW roll-out in their schools and the challenges facing them. All 64 schools have been implementing the CfW since September 2022. The focus of the interviews was on general progress towards curriculum implementation; international languages, RSE; learner progression; assessment; equity and

inclusivity; and engagement with parents (which reflects Audit Wales recommendations in their 2022 report).

4.14 Fieldwork is already underway for wave two and we expect to publish findings from that in September. This includes follow up interviews with senior leaders to understand ongoing progress, as well as a focus on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories; Welsh language and CWRE. Wave two also involves focus groups with year 4 to 7 learners to capture their views and experiences of the first year of CfW.

Other data sources

4.15 We will utilise other data sources in our CfW evaluation where they contribute to understanding the effectiveness and outcomes of the curriculum reform process. The types of data sources include government administrative datasets, national participation and attainment data, education survey data, (e.g. the [WISERD Education Multi Cohort Study; School Health Research Network \(SHRN\)](#)), Estyn inspection evidence and ad hoc research and evaluation studies. These data sources are managed by a variety of organisations including Welsh Government and other education stakeholders.

School information ecosystem

4.16 We want a streamlined, coherent approach to information across our education system: one which puts learning and learners at the centre and minimises the burdens on our practitioners. The [research report](#) on developing a new data and information ecosystem presents findings and recommendations relating to the data and information needs of the school system in Wales and the development of a new data and information ecosystem that underpins the curriculum and assessment reforms. The report sets out recommendations for approaches to using data and information, in a way that will allow partners across the system to work together to support all our learners, irrespective of background, to fulfil their potential.

4.17 Following the Ministerial [written statement](#) on school improvement and information on 19 January, we are now speaking with schools to develop thinking on a new information ecosystem for Wales. While remaining mindful of Audit Wales' recommendation from their 2022 report, this term we are convening a practitioners' group to develop more detailed proposals, whilst we move towards a reformed information ecosystem that uses qualifications data as part of a much broader information landscape. In taking this work forward, we will:

- consider how the recommendations can be applied to a data and information ecosystem that supports CfW ambitions and underpins the aims of all school education policy, whilst balancing the varying needs of different stakeholders
- draw on the report to design an information ecosystem based on firm principles, that can continuously develop as reform embeds in the school system and as education policy continues to evolve
- draw on the recommendations to improve ways in which we can contextualise data to:
 - i) support its interpretation, and

- ii) better analyse the impact of poverty and other barriers faced by learners and support effectiveness for disadvantaged young people
- continue to work in partnership with stakeholders on the detail of the report's recommendations and take forward the appropriate programme of work
- fully consider the recommendations in developing our reformed approach to using information to support school improvement, and, in partnership with schools, move towards a more holistic system that promotes learning and puts learners, practitioners, parents and carers at the centre.

Welsh Government Evidence Paper – CYPE Committee

10 May 2023

Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Implementation

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Achieving excellence, equity and well-being for all children and young people is a core purpose of education reforms in Wales. At midway through the second year of implementation, a range of evidence and monitoring activities are underway to understand progress of implementation of the ALN system (the ALN Act and ALN Code and associated regulations) on the needs of learners and their families.
- 1.2. The Welsh Government continues to work closely with stakeholders and commission a range of evidence sources to monitor implementation of the ALN system. These include, the ALN Reform National Steering Group, Estyn in its role as education and training inspectorate for Wales, the Interim ALN National Implementation Lead, Post-16 ALN Implementation Lead, the National Academy of Educational Leadership Wales, SNAP Cymru and the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Board (TRRAB). This is in addition to insights coming through the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) [“early insights” report published](#) on 27 April. This paper draws on engagement, feedback and evidence from these stakeholders.
- 1.3. We have commissioned Arad Research to undertake a formative evaluation of the ALN system. The four-year research contract started in January 2023 and will assess implementation of the ALN system and the realisation of policy objectives. The research will also explore the cost implications of implementing the reforms and identify any emerging impacts. This iterative process will provide key review milestones that will enable the Welsh Government and key partners to respond appropriately to the emerging evidence on the implementation of the ALN system.

2. Progress on ALN Implementation

Overview

- 2.1. The [national mission: high standards and aspirations for all](#) sets out our roadmap to realign our vision for an inclusive education system. Breaking down barriers so that excellent education opportunities and outcomes can be achieved by all learners, at all ages, in classrooms, online, and in work - through early identification, support and targeted actions.

- 2.2. Together, the CfW and the ALN Act seek to transform the expectations, learning experiences and outcomes for children and young people. Both emphasise an inclusive education system which balances equity of access to the curriculum for all learners with addressing the needs of individual learners. The CfW is designed to raise aspiration for all learners, with Additional Learning Provision (ALP) planned and set out in an Individual Development Plan (IDP) to support learners whose needs cannot be met without additional support.
- 2.3. Implementation of the 2018 Act commenced on 1 September 2021 with the ALN system being phased in over a period of 4 years up until August 2025. Children move over to the ALN system in groups over the 4 years.
- 2.4. The education sector has made considerable progress to prepare and implement the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act alongside rollout of the CfW.
- 2.5. Estyn's summary annual report 2021-22 found that, overall, providers have maintained steady progress towards implementing additional learning needs reform and have welcomed many aspects to the changes in approach. Positive progress is being reported, in both embedding whole school inclusive practice, planning to meet the needs of all learners, and enhancing involvement and engagement with children and their families. Importantly there are early signs that there is a systematic shift in practice around meeting the needs of learners through quality, differentiated routine teaching.

Movement of children who have ALN that calls for ALP under the ALN Act

- 2.6. On March 20, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language announced an extension to the implementation of the ALN Act from three years to four years, to respond to workload pressures, to create more flexibility, and protect quality of practice, plans, and provision that meets the needs of learners. This was in response to feedback over the last six months from Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCo), local authorities, head teachers, Unions and third sector providers who have told us that more time is needed to move learners from SEN to ALN and embed effective change.
- 2.7. Extending implementation means that children who were due to move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2024, will now move to the ALN system between September 2023 and August 2025. The rights for children, and their parents, to request a child moves to the ALN system is unaffected – meaning that children who want to move to the ALN system can still ask to do so.
- 2.8. The National Implementation Lead reports that extensive adaptations have been made by all LAs to accommodate the new way of working. Nearly all have made good use of the additional Welsh Government funding expanded the workforce in anticipation of the forecasted increased demands of delivering the new way of

working, increased administrative aspects of establishing new processes and systems, whilst running both the ALN and SEN systems concurrently. However, most LAs have needed to secure additional core funding as the changes necessary are seen as long-term and not exclusively related to implementation.

- 2.9. Nearly all LAs are confident in their ability to manage the moving of the mandated year groups during year 2, however identified concerns over managing the 3rd year demands to both review the IDPs created this year and move the remaining cohort from the SEN to the ALN system.
- 2.10. LA's report that completing the IDP process within the prescribed timescale is frequently challenging and many LAs report that they miss completion deadlines. All LAs are prioritising quality over meeting deadlines and giving appropriate attention to creating meaningful and genuinely person-centred plans where learners and their parents have a say in all aspects of decision making.

Parallel curriculum and additional learning needs (ALN) reform

- 2.11. An inclusive education system is one where learners' needs are listened to and learners are supported to participate fully in education with a whole setting approach is taken to meeting the needs of all learners. A school's curriculum should raise the aspirations for all learners and respond to individual needs, and it should therefore support the identification, planning and progression for learners with ALN.
- 2.12. The CfW provides flexibility for schools and teachers to design their own curriculum. Schools should be aware of the needs and circumstances of all their learners when designing their own curriculum, considering equity of opportunity when putting into place support and interventions or making reasonable adjustments.
- 2.13. An IDP sets out provision that delivers tangible additional learning provision that contributes in a meaningful way to the child or young person's achievement of their full potential. Learners with ALN will receive an IDP when they require ALP.
- 2.14. In relation to progression and assessment, the new arrangements require schools to understand whether different groups of learners are making expected progress, including those with ALN.
- 2.15. Last year, Estyn's annual report¹ found that by July 2022, nearly all providers had successfully begun to identify those learners who need ALN intervention and mapped out the universal provision needs for other learners. Nearly all providers continue to make steady progress in reforming their provision to meet the requirements of the ALN Code.

¹ [The Chief Inspector's Annual Report 2021-2022 | Estyn \(gov.wales\)](#)

- 2.16. Early insights on CfW implementation, reports feedback from senior primary school leaders on the advantages of the CfW. It is allowing them to promote and focus on inclusivity for ALN and vulnerable learners more than the previous curriculum has done, at a time when this is vital. They are finding that learners who were often previously withdrawn, are able to remain in class, and have their needs met with classroom support.
- 2.17. Moreover, early insights point to wider improvements to learner centred practice. Senior leaders felt that they were now more learner-centred in their approach to curriculum design, with the flexibility to tailor support according to learners' needs. An increased focus on learner voice activity which was now considered to be more central to curriculum design, and more individualised approaches to monitoring learner progress was felt to support a learner-centred and inclusive education. The ALN Evaluation will explore the early insights in more detail.

Early Years

- 2.18. The code requires that every local authority designate an Early Years ALN Lead Officer (EY ALNLO) to have responsibility for coordinating the local authority's functions under the Act in relation to children under compulsory school age who are not attending maintained schools. They have a pivotal role in facilitating early identification of needs, ensuring the right provision is identified earlier, and ALN prevented from developing or escalating.
- 2.19. Estyn report that the role of the EY ALNLO has enabled nearly all local authorities to make progress in implementing the ALN Act. Anecdotal evidence from EY ALNLOs has highlighted families have more confidence in the system as their views are considered and they are involved in decisions including through person centred meetings. Any frustrations have primarily been around miscommunication of information about the new ALN system, with most cases being swiftly resolved.
- 2.20. Local authorities have reported an increase of learners presenting with complex needs. This has been identified across all age groups, but this has been of particular concern in the early years in relation to speech, language and communication (SLC), and particularly social communication.
- 2.21. The Welsh Government's 'Talk with Me' (TWM) [delivery plan](#) prioritises evidence based support for SLC at universal, population and targeted levels. By getting early identification and support right, we can reduce the demand for specialist services and free up capacity to support learners with more specialist needs, including ALN.
- 2.22. Objective 4 of the TWM plan is to 'upskill the childcare, health and social care workforce to address SLC needs. The All Wales SLC 0-5s training pathway tool has been rolled out in order to address this commitment. Settings across Wales can access a range of SLC training options and we are in the process of making these available in Welsh. We have a dedicated Talk with Me [practitioner page](#)

which provides a wide range of resources to support practitioners in giving evidence-based support.

- 2.23. Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually (Cwlwm) continues to support the Welsh Government to implement and evaluate the ALN Act, ensuring the sector has up-to-date resources, information and advice to enable effective implementation. Issues have been raised in relation to the need for appropriate and ongoing training for all settings, including childminders. Some good practice has been noted, with childminders using one-page profiles to support the children they care for, to keep families involved and to support transition to other settings.

Post 16 implementation

- 2.24. ALN implementation for post-16 learners will begin in September 2023, young people will flow through to the ALN system over the next two academic years. Those currently in Year 11 will move to post-16 education and training with their IDPs in place in September this year. Any young person not yet in the ALN system at the end of academic year 2024 to 25 will move to the ALN system at that point.
- 2.25. The Post-16 National Implementation Lead reports that FEIs are continuing to make significant progress in preparing for the ALN Act. Principals and governing bodies, while voicing concerns over workforce capacity, recognise the positive impact that the ALN Act can have and support its introduction. There has been a significant increase in focus within the sector as the implementation for post-16 draws near.
- 2.26. Partnership working between LAs and FEIs continues to strengthen across Wales, but work remains necessary to develop a shared vision between LAs, FEIs and health delivery partners to best meet the needs of post 16 learners with ALN. This is being facilitated through workshops and focused task and finish groups.
- 2.27. The Welsh Government has invested £700k in 2023- 24 to FEIs and an additional £225k for LAs to develop joint working and partnership projects to prepare for transition and to improve additional learning provision locally.
- 2.28. While FEIs can meet the needs of the vast majority of young people with ALN, in rare cases, young people who have very complex ALN, may need to attend independent special post-16 institutions ('ISPis') to receive their further education and training. Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the Welsh Government is responsible for securing and funding specialist provision. Under the ALN Act, this responsibility will transfer to LAs.
- 2.29. The budget for ISPI placements will be transferred to local authorities in 2025-26. Options for transferring the budget are currently subject to consultation with LAs. Initial discussions recognise the difficulty of the decision required but LAs welcome the early indication and clear strategic direction to increase local mainstream

provision for young people with ALN. There is also recognition of the work that many LAs already do to secure and develop that provision locally.

- 2.30. Interim arrangements have been put in place for 2023-25 which will enable LAs to make decisions on specialist provision for young people who will move to the ALN system during this period. The Welsh Government will reimburse the costs of these placements via the Local Authority Education Grant.
- 2.31. The Welsh Government will continue to make decisions and fund placements for those currently in year 12 and above until 31 August 2025. Any funding commitments made by the Welsh Government will remain available until the agreed programme of study is completed.
- 2.32. The establishment of Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) provides additional opportunities to secure and fund facilities for further education and training, and secure general, proper, and reasonable facilities for learners with ALN.

Participation of children and young people

- 2.33. The Act requires that learners' views should always be considered as part of the planning process, along with those of their parents/carers. Estyn report a consensus from schools that person-centred practice brings a significant and well-needed improvement to supporting learners with ALN and their families. Additional learning needs coordinators (ALNCos) in schools have a good understanding of the new requirements and are positive about the changes.
- 2.34. The Welsh Government recently funded SNAP Cymru to run a series of free parent and carer events for families of children with ALN/Disabilities aged 0-25. Nearly 300 people participated in 14 sessions held in local venues across Wales and online.
- 2.35. The sessions took place online and in person across Wales and offered parents and carers opportunities for attendees to find out more about the implementation of the ALN system in Wales; share with the Welsh Government their experiences of the ALN reforms and their views on the ALN code; and access independent support and advice from the SNAP Cymru team. The in-person events also encouraged parents and carers to meet and connect with other families with a shared lived experience of ALN.
- 2.36. The sessions have provided useful feedback on what is going well, but importantly parent and carer feedback on actions and recommendations for key partners and government to improve system effectiveness for learners.
- 2.37. We have commissioned Children in Wales to establish an Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Children and Young People's Participation programme across a

range of settings in Wales, to ensure the voice and rights of children are at the core of planning and policy. This project has been initiated and recruitment is underway.

Welsh Language

- 2.38. One of the core aims of the ALN Act is to create a bilingual system of support for learners with ALN. Welsh-medium education is for all, and no child should be left behind. However, Welsh-medium providers and families continue to express concerns around the availability of Welsh language workforce, assessments and resources to support ALN identification and provision.
- 2.39. The planning of Welsh-medium ALN provision forms a key part of Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESPs). Local authorities must set out in their WESPs how they will use the findings of its reviews under the ALN Act to improve Welsh language provision for learners with additional learning needs and for workforce planning within the ALN sector.
- 2.40. We recognise that there is more to be done to develop Welsh language resources for learners with ALN. Through the newly established bilingual educational resources company, 'Adnodd', we aim to continue creating new Welsh-medium resources to support learning and teaching under the CfW and identify and commission resources to better support ALN learners.
- 2.41. The importance of having a sufficient number of teachers, support workers and other practitioners able to work through the medium of Welsh to support learners with ALN is recognised in the [Welsh in Education Workforce Plan](#). It includes actions that aim to develop capacity and expertise within the workforce to support learners with additional learning needs in the Welsh-medium sector.
- 2.42. To strengthen the Welsh language support and additional learning provision available to children and young people we will appoint a Welsh Language Implementation Lead. The officer will facilitate the sharing of good practice, encourage collaboration and effective sector working to maximise expertise knowledge and skills developing a consistent approach to Welsh language provision across Wales.

Collaboration and multiagency input

- 2.43. The ALN system encourages improved collaboration and information sharing between agencies, which are essential to ensuring that needs are identified early, and the right support is put in place to enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes.
- 2.44. The Interim National Implementation Lead reports that LAs have excellent productive and professional relationships with the Designated Educational Clinical Lead officers (DECLOs) and significant efforts are being put into multi-agency

working. All health boards are committed to providing as much support as is practicable in helping LAs and schools through attending individual person-centred practice (PCP) meetings and contributing to the development of IDPs. Where this is working well, collaborative approaches enable the development of a joint understanding of how best to support individual learners and their families.

- 2.45. Effective work has been undertaken in each health board by DECLOs to raise awareness at a practitioner and executive level about the duties of the Act and the ALN system. All health boards are cognisant of their responsibilities, however, because of the continuous and cumulous impact of the pandemic, understandably efforts and resources are prioritised to address these acute issues, and demand for involvement from health practitioners outstrips the capacity to supply. Although the DECLOs are well-supported by executive leads, influencing systemic changes to support the principles of the new way of working in nearly all health boards, is in the early stages of development.
- 2.46. Significant inroads have been made in collaboration between the DECLOs. This has enabled initial developments in establishing joint national approaches to address specific operational or strategic issues. Further activities are planned with delivery partners to share and refine this work on a national footprint.
- 2.47. The effectiveness of partnership working between LAs and health boards is variable but is continuing to improve. Some early successes however have been secured which have led to very useful improvements to a shared and co-ordinated approach, for example multi-agency ALN panels or forums (including early years and post 16). Local authorities have concerns around the capacity of health professionals to engage consistently in the IDP process, a few school leaders believe that health representatives are not clear about their role in the IDP process.
- 2.48. Developing consistent practice across health boards is noted as sometimes challenging, given that each one serves multiple local authorities. Typically, each LA has different operational practices, different information management systems and have different ways of supporting ALN. Both health boards and Las will need to look for ways to adjust their approaches to ensure cooperative working.
- 2.49. In a gradually maturing system, further work is needed to establish joint expectations between local authorities and health boards, and to realise the expectations of good quality interprofessional working between jointly accountable bodies in education and health. The ALN evaluation activity will need to ensure that the views and perspectives of DECLOs and health practitioners are captured, to support a balanced understanding of multiagency implementation.

Strengthening the rights of the child

- 2.50. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 established duties on local authorities to deliver a less adversarial system by

providing people with information and advice about the ALN system, arrangements for resolving disagreements and provision of independent advocacy services for the children and young people for whom it is responsible.

- 2.51. Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure parents have access to impartial information and advice regarding SEN/ALN provision in addition to arranging dispute resolution and advocacy services.
- 2.52. SNAP Cymru provides reliable impartial support for children and young people, parents and carers throughout Wales in relation the ALN system. As part of their services, SNAP provide independent disagreement resolution services to most local authorities in Wales. Most local authorities sub-contract to external organisations, whilst some provide impartial in-house services.
- 2.53. Educational Tribunal Wales (ETW) has jurisdiction to determine appeals about additional learning needs, special educational needs and discrimination in schools. Appeals can be brought by or behalf of nursery age children and young people from 16 to 25 years. Short term additional resources have been provided for the Welsh Tribunal office to respond to additional workload as a consequence of test cases and increase parental rights under the new system. Welsh Tribunals are expected to publish an annual report during 2023 to provide early insights on appeals.

Increased complexity of need

- 2.54. Estyn's 2021/22 annual report highlighted the continued social and emotional impacts of Covid 19 have led to an increase in learner needs and demands on services.
- 2.55. The National Implementation lead monitoring of LA's concurs and reports an increase of learners presenting with complex needs across all age groups. It is of particular concern in the early years in relation to language and social communication with a significant increase of referrals being made to LAs. Consequently, LAs have needed to develop professional learning opportunities that support schools in establishing capacity building approaches to meeting needs.
- 2.56. All LAs report that schools are facing unprecedented an on-going demand to cater for a much wider than usual range of need particularly in relation to social and emotional well-being of learners with an increasing trend of exclusions, reduced timetables, non-attendance and those choosing elective home education. A reduction in school budgets is believed to have exacerbated the situation as schools report that they no longer have the capacity to meet such increased demands. All LAs report that there is an increased demand for specialist placements which far exceeds current capacity.

- 2.57. The WG has maintained a £9.1m Local Authorities grant from 2023-2024, 24-25 to respond to additional pressures and social and emotional issues of ALN learners.
- 2.58. Meanwhile, we are clear the only sustainable way of responding to rising demand and the multifaceted nature of mental health support is to ensure prevention and early intervention, coupled with good, universal support available and good access to specialised services which is why we are adopting a whole system approach to service provision in Wales.
- 2.59. We have developed the NYTH/NEST Framework as a planning tool for Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to implement a Whole System Approach in their areas. We have recently appointed a NEST Implementation Lead who is working across Government, with RPB's and external stakeholders to truly embed NYTH/NEST in children and young people policy.
- 2.60. This compliments our whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing and the statutory guidance we published in March 2021. We provided £12.2m funding in 2022-23 to support schools to embed the guidance and develop a school ethos with wellbeing at its heart. Funding has been used to appoint implementation coordinators embedded within the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes; implement a range of universal and targeted wellbeing interventions in schools; train teachers and other school staff on wellbeing; and ensure all-Wales coverage of the CAMHS school in-reach service, which sees dedicated mental health practitioners in schools.
- 2.61. A three-year Neurodevelopmental Services Improvement Plan backed by £12M is addressing immediate pressures on neurodevelopmental assessment waiting times and improving support within services. It is developing sustainable integrated needs led services with a skilled and resilient work force. However, a diagnosis is not required to access educational support, and neither should support be delayed while children and young people wait for an assessment.

3. Managing ALN reform

Implementation support

- 3.1. The Transformation Programme was fundamental and successful in providing advice, support and challenge to local authorities and other delivery partners in preparing for the ALN system. Estyn find that Local authorities and ALN advisory teams provided beneficial support for schools during the four-year transformation programme process, including helping schools to understand the ALN Code and Welsh Government guidance. Their work included briefing sessions, professional learning opportunities, facilitating school-to-school collaboration, cluster working and providing useful materials.

- 3.2. An ALN Reform National Steering Group was established in May 2022 to provide strategic direction, multi-agency oversight and support to the sector and move the ALN programme from transformation, through implementation and beyond. Liz Jones was appointed as Interim National Implementation Lead role in April 2022. Chris Denham, ALN Transformation Lead (Further Education) continued work with FEIs on implementation readiness.
- 3.3. Implementation funding has been deployed for transformation preparations and support implementation, recognising pressures of implementation whilst managing parallel SEN system, with over £62m revenue funding invested between 2020 and 2023.
- 3.4. For 23-24, the ALN implementation grant has been increased to £12m, from £6.6m for 23-24 across Wales. £10.4m direct to schools and £70k per local authority.

Shared understanding of the Act and Code

- 3.5. Improving understanding of responsibilities under the ALN system is critical, and ambiguity is reported from a range of sources around the responsibility for planning and maintaining an IDP.
- 3.6. Estyn have found that generally, school leaders understand when an IDP will be maintained by the school and those that will be maintained by the local authority. However, they have found instances where there has been inconsistency and ambiguity around the responsibility for maintaining an IDP.
- 3.7. Estyn has raised some concern that this lack of understanding of the definition of ALN or ALP is leading to inconsistent application of the terms. A few school leaders comment that the definitions of ALN or ALP are too broad and are, therefore, open to different interpretations. Some leaders report that health professionals have different understanding of the terms too.
- 3.8. The Code expects all LAs, in consultation with schools to establish and publish, a set of principles that will be applied when determining whether the school or LA should secure the ALP required to meet individual need. Just over half of the LAs have published their Principles Document with work underway in all the remaining LAs to complete this during the academic year.
- 3.9. As part of the National Implementation steering group we are currently establishing task and finish groups to improve shared national understanding of duties as described in the code.

Professional learning

- 3.10. Professional standards for teaching and leadership make clear the responsibility on all teachers and leaders to ensure the needs of all learners are met, all staff

who work with children and young people with ALN have a responsibility for ensuring that their learners' needs are identified and provided for.

- 3.11. The ALN professional learning offer available to practitioners, system leaders and advisors enables them to develop the skills they need to meet the needs of learners with ALN so they can put in place differentiated teaching or other targeted interventions and make best use of expert advice and support.
- 3.12. The national ALN professional learning pathway is available to all teachers who support learners with ALN, and especially ALNCoS who have a strategic role in schools and colleges and are the first point of call for teachers seeking advice and guidance on ALN. Education practitioners can also opt to enhance their professional knowledge of ALN by pursuing the ALN pathway on the National MA (Masters) in Education (Wales). Training on the ALN system is available for those in statutory and senior leadership roles.
- 3.13. As part of a refresh of the accreditation criteria for ITE programmes, we are strengthening expectations for supporting learners with ALN as part of student teachers core studies.
- 3.14. The National Implementation lead reports that all LAs have provided extensive guidance and support to schools in developing effective individual IDPs. The practice of evaluating the quality and impact of IDPs is continuing to develop but remains variable. In a few LAs robust and embedded process are in place that have secured sustainable school-led mechanisms for quality assuring IDPs. All LAs though, have at the very least, basic processes for assuring the quality of IDPs. Early feedback suggests that the quality of school maintained IDPs are variable and that in most LAs there is a need to revisit professional learning for ALNCoS to improve effective and consistent practice.
- 3.15. Wider workforce is integral to effective reform, and we are responding to deficits across with sector. The WG is investing £6.2m to train 10 new Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) students per year for three years from 22-25.
- 3.16. In 2018 we allocated over £289k to regions over three years to support the post-graduate training of local authority-based specialist and advisory teachers of learners with sensory impairment.
- 3.17. We have funded the Third Sector Additional Needs Alliance (TSANA) to develop a set of e-learning modules to help practitioners identify and support learners with certain disablements and learning needs in schools.

ALNCo Workloads

- 3.18. The National Implementation Lead reports that there is a general consensus from schools that person-centred practice brings a significant and well-needed improvement to supporting learners with ALN and their families.
- 3.19. Although this new approach is valued and much preferred, conducting the IDP process as it is intended requires more time than anticipated and far exceeds that allowed for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators under the old system.
- 3.20. All LAs, and the education workforce express considerable concerns about workload issues in schools and settings in implementing the new way of working. Consequently, many ALNCOs report that there is a significant increase in demand on their time. In addition, the new statutory duties bring increased accountabilities for schools which in turn impacts on the responsibilities of ALNCOs and senior leaders. Many LAs report that schools are currently or at risk of, experiencing retention and recruitment issues with regard to ALNCOs.
- 3.21. Whilst the ALN Code makes clear that the designation of an ALNCO does not remove the responsibilities of the wider workforce; we are alert to concerns about the increased workload placed upon ALNCOs and the need for schools to ensure there is sufficient support around the ALNCO to prevent them becoming isolated and overwhelmed with caseloads.
- 3.22. £12m implementation funding has been deployed for 23-24, £10.4m direct to schools to temporarily increase schools and settings capacity and time to deliver a whole school/settings approach to meeting needs of ALN learners.
- 3.23. The National Academy ALN Unlocked events will provide a forum for ALNCOs to support each other by sharing experiences and best practice.
- 3.24. Additional INSET days have been agreed to align effective professional learning with Welsh Government priorities including ALN and help ensure all staff understand their individual and collective responsibilities.
- 3.25. A task and finish group made up of practitioners and trade union representatives will review and provide recommendations on ALNCO pay and non-contact time by December 2023. Similarly, the WLGA Social Partnership Forum Task and Finish Group is looking into a variety of issues relating to Teaching Assistants, including workload and responsibilities and a move towards common pay scales across Wales. The group is expected to report in July 2023.

4. Monitoring, Data and Evaluation

Evaluation

- 4.1. The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad Research to undertake an evaluation of Evaluation of the Additional Learning Needs System. The aim of the research is to carry out a formative evaluation of the additional learning needs (ALN) system. This will include assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the system, identifying any barriers or facilitators to implementation and interventions that could be put in place to support implementation, and any early anticipated or emerging impacts of the new system. The programme will work closely with stakeholder groups to support us with assessing the impact.
- 4.2. This will involve developing a logic model and theory of change and evaluating the implementation of the ALN system including exploration of cost implications of implementing the reforms, as well as identifying any emerging impacts.
- 4.3. The evaluation will involve four phases. Following the development of a logic model and theory of change, the first two phases will focus on evaluating the implementation of the ALN system. A survey of practitioners will take place during the summer of 2023 and in-depth field work with schools/settings, stakeholders, parents and learners between Oct 2023 and Sept 2024. The third and fourth phases will consider early impacts and progress. A survey of practitioners, parents and caregivers between Oct 2024 and June 2025 and in-depth fieldwork with schools/settings, stakeholders, parents and learners between July 2025 and September 2026. A report will be published at the end of each phase of the evaluation.

ALN Data

- 4.1. Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) data is published annually. The last PLASC data for February 2022 showed 74,661 SEN/ALN learners, down from 92,668 in April 2021 (just prior to the start of the first year of the ALN system implementation), a fall of 19.5% (18,007 learners) in SEN/ALN numbers.
- 4.2. The 2023 PLASC headline statistics will be published on 25 May and provide a more up to date snapshot on learner status and changes in the system.
- 4.3. It is too early to draw conclusions from the data, and we are continuing to monitor the impact on data and metrics as a consequence of the introduction of ALNET.
- 4.4. The Welsh Government made a commitment to the committee to provide more regular data on ALN learners. Management information data collected from schools can provide a snapshot of learner status, and weekly attendance data shows, in the week beginning 13 March 2023, 8,867 learners in maintained settings had an Individual Development Plan (IDP). 6,853 of these are school maintained IDPs, and 2,014 are maintained by local authorities. It reports the total number of learners with SEN or ALN is now at 61,397.

- 4.5. The data from the weekly attendance collection provides useful intelligence, but its accuracy should be heavily caveated. This data is management information extracted from school management information systems once a week and has not undergone the same level of quality assurance as official statistics. In addition, some schools do not update the SEN/ALN information regularly for the attendance data, and instead wait until the annual PLASC return is required.
- 4.6. The PLASC data points to a continuing downward trend in numbers of children with ALN as the ALN system commences for groups of learners. In September 2022, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language wrote to the Committee to outline the reasons for the reduction.
- 4.7. It is likely that the numbers of children recognised as SEN or ALN will continue to reduce throughout the implementation period, predominantly from those children at the SEN school action level, who are now receiving support as part of improved differentiated teaching and inclusive education practice.
- 4.8. We have since sought assurance from Estyn during the autumn term of 2022. They conducted visits to ten maintained primary and secondary schools with a focus on the new ALN arrangements. They noted a significant reduction in the number of pupils on the ALN register but that overall, it appears that in many schools, learners' ongoing progress is monitored appropriately, and they continue to receive suitable targeted support. Most leaders explain that most of the learners removed from schools' ALN registers were formerly on the school action stage of special educational needs (SEN) provision.
- 4.9. They highlighted the various strategies many schools have already implemented to ensure the needs of these learners are still being met, and their ongoing progress is monitored appropriately. For example, planning to meet the needs of learners, upskilling staff to ensure they have a clear understanding of universal provision and using a range of data to monitor all learners' progress. However, Estyn highlighted that many schools are in the early stages of implementing these processes and they do not have robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating them.
- 4.10. Estyn's thematic review of ALN implementation taking place during 2023 will provide further insights as implementation progresses.