

Children and Young People Committee Consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill

Summary of Outreach Work

Background

This document provides a summary of the Outreach work conducted as part of the Children and Young People Committee consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill.

Methodology

As part of the consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill the Outreach team conducted three evidence gathering exercises on behalf of the Children and Young People Committee. The engagement exercises consisted of two sets of focus groups and a survey.

The focus group programmes concentrated on two key aspects of the Education (Wales) Bill, namely:

- the provisions in the Bill relating to the post-16 assessment of educational and training needs, and;
- provisions relating to the proposed Education Workforce Council and the registration and regulation of teachers and the wider workforce.

The survey consisted of both online and paper-based questionnaires which asked participants to give their views on the perceived impact of the Welsh Government's proposals to standardise school term and holiday dates in Wales.



Key Statistics

430 Total number of survey responses received

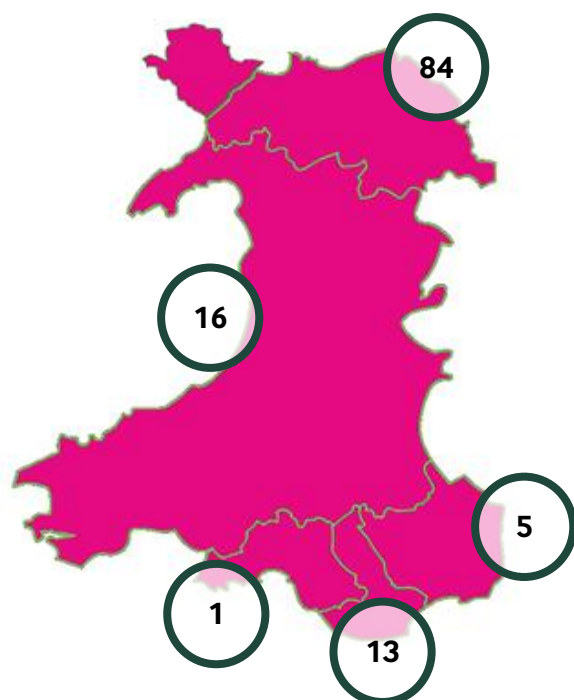
35 Total number of focus group participants

582 Total number of comments made in the survey

6 Total number of focus groups held

Total Number of Participants by Region

This diagram shows the **total** number of people engaged with directly as part of the Education (Wales) Bill inquiry.



Breakdown

Total number of focus group participants by region:

- North Wales: 11
- Mid and West Wales: 7
- South Wales West: 1
- South Wales Central: 11
- South Wales East: 5

Total number of paper-based survey respondents by region:

- North Wales: 73
- Mid and West Wales: 9
- South Wales West: 0
- South Wales Central: 2
- South Wales East: 0



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Children and Young People Committee Consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill

Summary of Education (Wales) Bill Survey Responses

Background

This document provides a summary of responses received to the Education (Wales) Bill survey conducted by the Outreach team.*

Methodology

As part of the Children and Young People Committee consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill the Outreach team conducted a Wales-wide survey on provisions contained within the Bill to give Welsh Ministers the power to standardise school term-times. The survey included both paper-based and online formats and asked participants to express their views on the perceived impact of the Welsh Government's proposed legislative changes.

Although an open survey the following audiences were primarily targeted:

- Parents and guardians
- Teachers (within the Welsh education sector)
- Children and young people of school-age

Key Statistics

Total Number of Responses Received: 430

Total Number of Online Responses Received: 346

Total Number of Paper-based Responses Received: 84

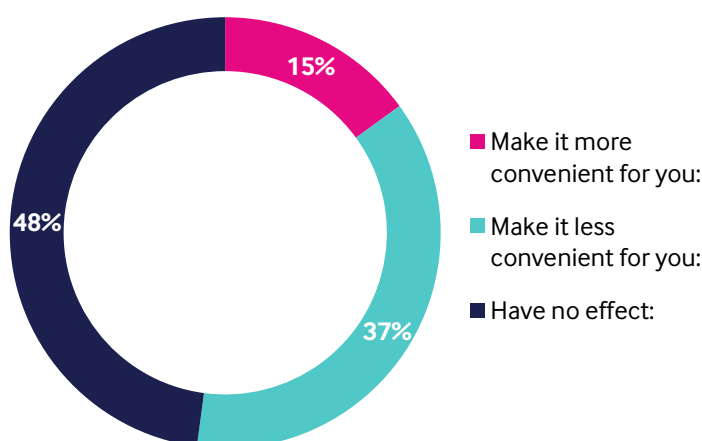
* (Please note that this document is inclusive of responses submitted in both Welsh and English).



Summary of Responses

Question 1 – In your opinion, does having different school terms and holiday dates at different times in different parts of Wales:

- Make it more convenient for you: 64 (15.0%)
- Make it less convenient for you: 158 (37.1%)
- Have no effect: 204 (47.9%)



33 comments were made highlighting the **negative aspects** of current arrangements including:

- 17 comments regarding the cost and provision of childcare
- 12 comments regarding the difficulties different term dates create in terms of spending time with family and friends
- Three people stated that different term dates prevent their children from taking part in cross-county activities
- One person outlined the difficulties of working with others within the Education profession

12 comments were made highlighting the **positive aspects** of current arrangements including:

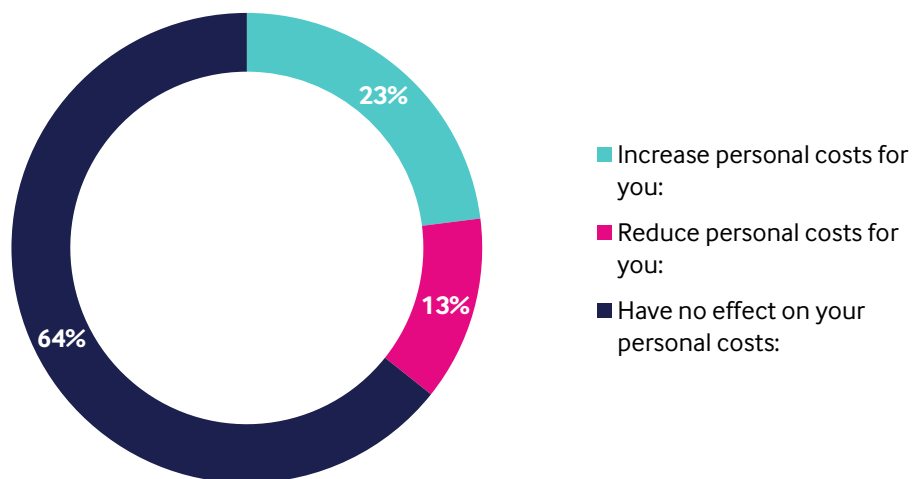
- 6 people highlighted the benefits of off-peak holidays
- 6 people stated that the facilities that children attend are less crowded at times when some schools are off and others are not



- Two comments were made suggesting that standardising term times would have little or no effect

Question 2 – In your opinion, does having different school terms and holiday dates at different times in different parts of Wales:

- Increase personal costs for you: 98 (23.0%)
- Reduce personal costs for you: 54 (12.7%)
- Have no effect on your personal costs: 274 (64.3%)



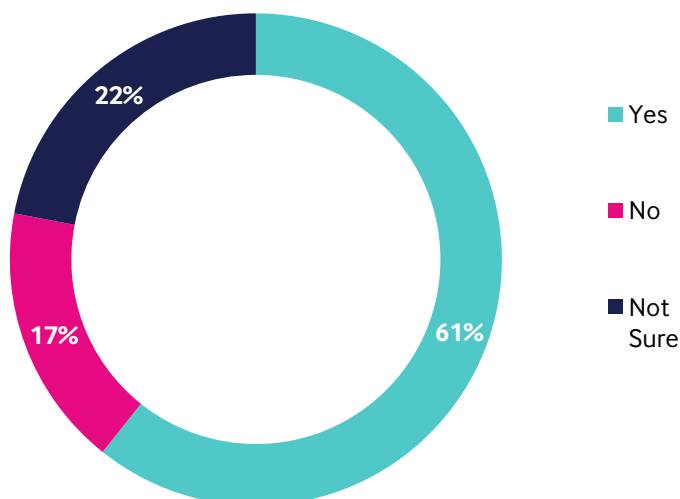
Of the comments made:

- 12 comments suggested that childcare costs are more expensive due to the current arrangement
- Four of the comments received suggested that the current arrangements make going on holiday cheaper
- Four people suggested that making any changes would have little effect
- Three people highlighted the logistical difficulties posed by variable term and holiday dates



Question 3 – Would you prefer school term and holiday dates to be the same across Wales?

- Yes: 260 (60.7%)
- No: 74 (17.3%)
- Not Sure: 94 (22.0%)



23 comments were made **in support of harmonising school term** and holiday dates across Wales including:

- Seven comments simply reiterating that it would be a welcome change
- Six comments suggesting that they would like to see coordination of school term and holiday dates with the rest of the UK
- And five comments stating that it would make arranging holidays easier

A total of seven comments were made **against harmonising school term** and holiday dates across Wales including:

- Four people stating that it would potentially increase holiday costs
- Three people argued for keeping the status quo without explaining why

A total of 5 additional comments were made including:

- Two comments advocating shorter, more staggered holidays throughout the year
- Two comments suggesting that the harmonisation of school term and holiday dates should apply to individual local authority areas (rather than across Wales)
- And one comment calling for longer holidays



Question 4 – Do you think there are any specific reasons why some schools may wish to set school term and holiday dates that are different to the majority of schools in Wales?

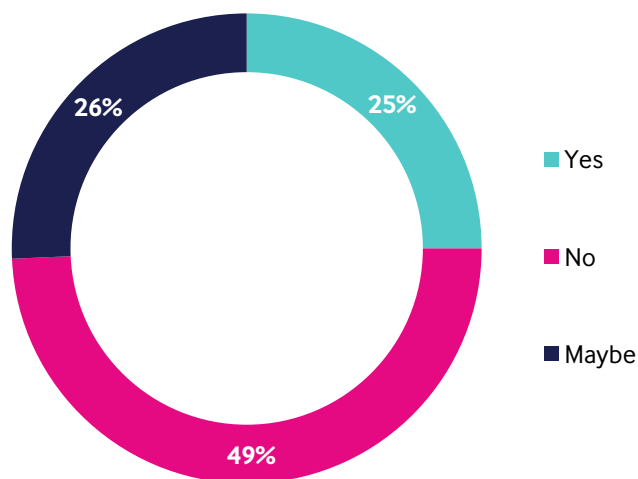
Of the comments made:

- 74 said they didn't know of any reasons schools may wish to set different dates to others across Wales
- 39 people sighted religious reasons
- 26 stated flexibility
- 22 said to allow access to cheaper holidays
- 16 suggested it makes sense for schools terms to be standardised
- 15 suggested due to local/regional events
- Three sighted making up for days lost to inclement weather
- One person each stated: financial reasons, allowing for longer tourist seasons, and the traditions of private schools.
- A number of individual comments were also made suggesting standardising dates could improve attendance, that dates should be the same in Wales and England and that religious schools shouldn't be treated differently from other schools.



Question 5 – Should certain schools, for example faith schools, be able to set their own term and holiday dates?

- Yes 106 (25.0%)
- No 209 (49.3%)
- Maybe 109 (25.7%)



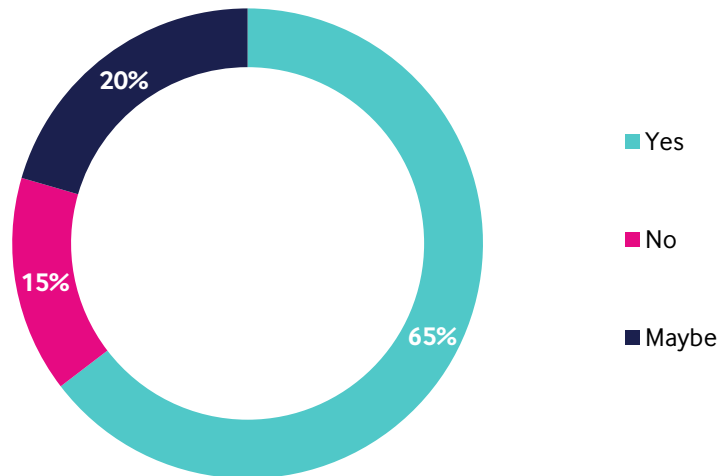
Of the comments made:

- 22 stated that religious holidays should be the only reasons certain schools should be able to set their own dates
- 18 disagreed and stated there should be no exceptions
- Six people wanted faith schools abolished
- Two comments were made recommending all schools set their own dates
- Two said that schools should be able to set their own dates for important local/regional events.
- One person stated that all faiths, not only the Christian faith, should be able to set their own dates
- One person stated that it was important that teachers and children are given a sufficient break from school, and that should take precedence.



Question 6 – Should the Welsh Government be able to decide term dates when Local Authorities and Governing Bodies can't agree?

- Yes: 274 (64.6%)
- No: 63 (14.9%)
- Maybe: 87 (20.5%)



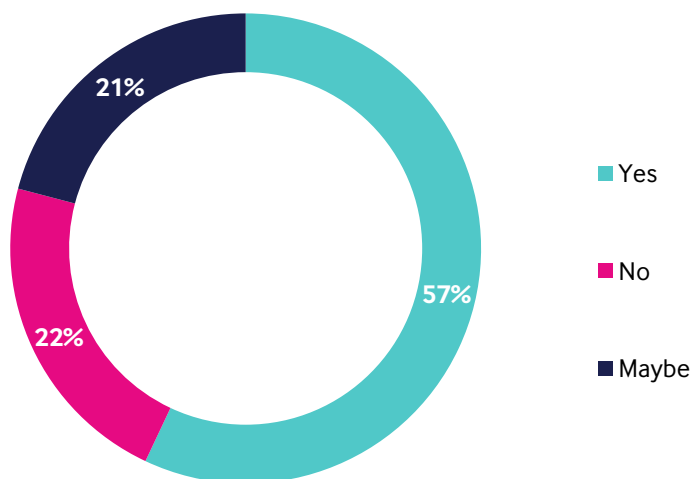
Of the comments made:

- 15 comments were made in support of the Welsh Government intervention
- 13 comments suggested that agreement should be reached without Welsh Government intervention
- Five comments supported agreement but did not agree with Welsh Government intervention
- Two comments stated a preference for local authorities to make the decision
- One preferred for governing bodies to decide
- One preferred for an independent body to decide
- And one suggested that head teachers should make the call.



Question 7 – If school terms are to be the same across Wales, should exemptions be made – for example, where major events are taking place in the region?

- Yes: 243 (57.0%)
- No: 94 (22.1%)
- Maybe: 89 (20.9%)

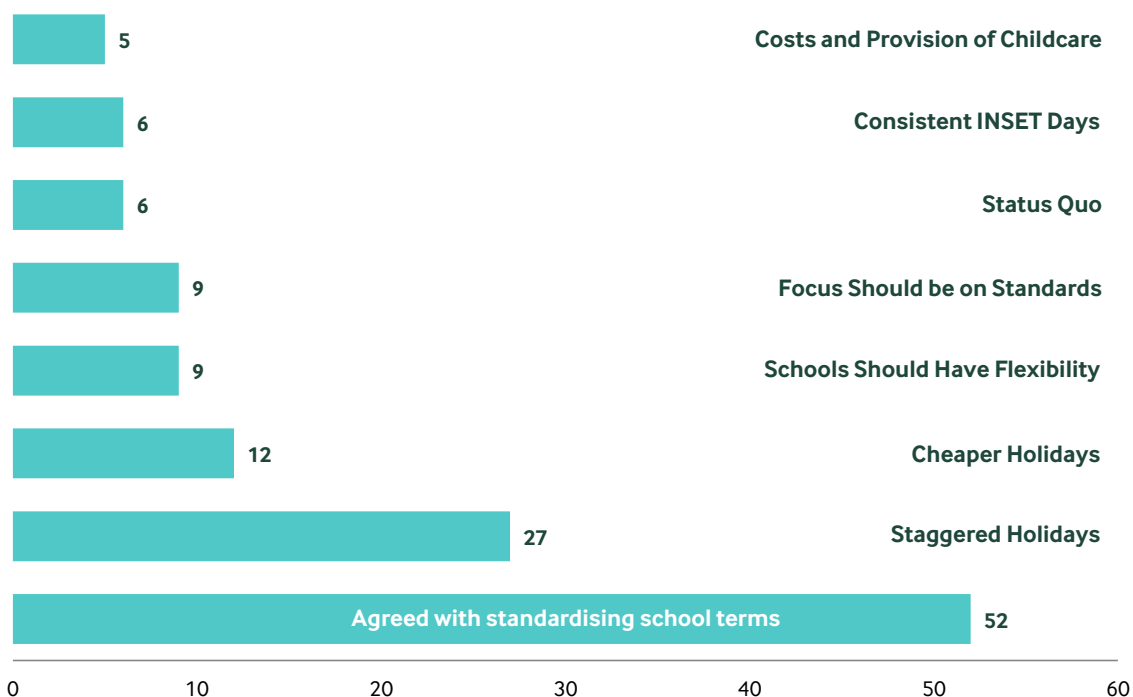


Of the comments made:

- 28 comments stated that exemptions should be made for major events
- 10 people stated that there should be no exemptions whatsoever
- Nine people said that exemptions should be made but did not state a reason why
- Five people said that exemptions should be made depending on the nature of the event
- Three people stated that the Welsh Government should take into account major events when setting school term dates
- Two said schools should determine exemptions themselves



Question 8 – Do you have any other thoughts or views?



Of the comments made:

- 52 stated that they agreed with the principle of standardising school term and holiday dates
- 27 people made the case for shorter and more frequent, staggered holidays
- 12 people stated that they believed that this would lead to cheaper holiday costs
- Nine people stated that they would like schools to retain the flexibility to set their own term and holiday dates
- Nine people argued that the Welsh Government should focus on standards
- Six people stated that the current situation should be left as it is
- Six comments were made that INSET days should be consistent across Wales
- Five people made comments relating to the cost and provision of childcare
- One person made a comment regarding the need for more activities for children during the holidays
- One person made the point that there are too many local authorities in Wales
- One person stated that the changes were a waste of money



Children and Young People Committee

Consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill: Registration of the Education Workforce

Summary of evidence from focus groups

This briefing has been produced by the Research Service for use by the Children and Young People Committee.

For further information, contact Gareth England in the Research Service

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Background

During September 2013, as part of the Children and Young People Committee's consultation on the **Education (Wales) Bill**, the National Assembly's Outreach Team conducted a number of focus groups to seek views on the registration aspect of the Bill, namely the **provisions relating to the proposed Education Workforce Council and the registration and regulation of teachers and the wider education workforce.**

Focus groups were held in north and south Wales, with the Outreach team targeting members of trades unions who would be required to register under the provisions of the Bill, classroom assistants, youth workers and work-based learning tutors. Time constraints on the part of the target audience and difficulties associated with holding a consultation during the summer months meant that a number of the contacted organisations were unable to take part in the focus group programme.

Two focus groups were held with two separate participant organisations: (a) members of **UNISON** and (b) youth workers from **Wrexham Youth Service**. The focus group participants encompassed a broad range of areas within the wider education workforce, including youth workers, classroom assistants, learning support assistants and tutors. **In total there were 11 participants.**

The following section provides a summary of the main findings.



Registration of the education workforce

Question 1 – Do you identify yourself as working within the ‘education workforce’?

Both groups - UNISON members and youth workers from Wrexham - identified themselves as being part of the education workforce. The nature of the work carried out by group members fell within the education system and groups felt that they were seen as partners and part of the wider education provision.

Question 2 – Do you want to register with a professional registration body in the way that teachers currently do?

Both groups were in favour of registering under a professional body. It was generally felt that membership of such a body would enhance the recognition of professions such as youth work, to the same level as teaching. Membership of a professional organisation was also seen as bringing **accountability** to professions ensuring that those working within them would adhere to policies procedures and codes of conduct.

There were a number of themes that arose from the groups; the issue of **qualifications** in the registration process being one of them. It was felt by one group that a **minimum level of qualification** would need to be set in order to be recognised by the professional body. This in turn raised the question of representation for **those working within the profession who had no qualifications** and whether this may create a group who would be excluded from membership. However it was also noted that such a minimum qualification could be used to raise standards and encourage employees to work toward gaining qualifications.

The definition of **roles within the profession** and the ambiguity this could create when deciding who would be able to join the organisation was also discussed. The point that the term ‘youth worker’ can apply equally to a volunteer and to a degree-educated professional was raised in this respect, as was the issue of people who carry out similar roles outside the education workforce. Similarly, **variations between the roles and responsibilities** carried out by individuals qualified to the same level can vary between local authorities as can **school budgets** and resources for training staff and it was felt that these inconsistencies should be considered as part of the process of setting up any new professional body.

Question 3 – How did you first hear about the proposal to register additional types of workers within the education workforce and were you aware of any consultation?

The levels of awareness of the proposals and consultation varied among participants, with the majority having **little or no awareness** of the plans or consultation until they were contacted as part of the outreach process.



Some were aware of notional plans for the creation of a new body although there was some confusion as to the extent of the representation of the body e.g. to people working in higher education.

Question 4 – Do you agree or disagree that other professionals in the wider education workforce should register in the way that teachers currently do?

There was **general agreement on this point**. It was felt that this would raise consistency in the way that workers with similar levels of qualification were treated and that there would be representation with regard to professional standards and status within the profession.

The extent to which these advantages would extend to the different professions was again raised in responses, namely would the wider education workforce receive the same level of support as teachers with regards issues such as training and development and confidentiality and representation in exceptional circumstances? e.g. child protection cases.

Question 5 – the new registration body will have responsibilities for the provision of advice and the promotion of careers for the whole education workforce and for induction and appraisal arrangements. What do you think the potential advantages or disadvantages could be? Do you think this would have a positive or negative impact on people working in education such as yourselves?

It was felt among the focus groups that the professional body would have a **positive impact with regards career progression** and that it would help promote consistency and standards across local authorities. This included the issue of **fair remuneration for staff reflecting their competencies and responsibilities** and also the wider issue of the promotion of youth work as a profession. One group also raised the possibility of having a similar status to the NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) for youth workers.

One focus group raised potential disadvantages surrounding **cross-border issues** and whether the adherence to a UK-wide system would be more beneficial with regards to cross-border flows of workers. Comparisons were drawn with the Scottish system in which those wishing to work in Scotland would have to show competencies and be trained in accordance with Scottish guidelines. It was felt that the success of any similar system in Wales would be very much dependent on the standards and cost effectiveness of training provided in Wales.



Question 6 – What level of registration fee do you think it would be reasonable for people to pay?

Question 7 – Do you think that this registration fee should be variable and based on income including different rates for different categories of work, or should there be a flat-rate fee for everyone?

There was variation between participants as to any registration fee. Some members of one of the focus groups argued that there should be **no fee for joining**, but there was **general acceptance that some level of fee would be appropriate**.

Those that agreed with the imposition of a fee varied on how it should be calculated. One group felt that it should vary according to the **grade of the worker** whilst the other felt it should be **income based**, arguing that a fee based on different categories of work would be difficult to maintain due to the lack of consistency in practice across local authorities in Wales.

It was agreed that there should be **parity across the professions** however, and that any subsidies for particular staff e.g. teachers, should be reflected among other less well remunerated professions. One group felt that this should also apply to wider benefits, e.g. tax relief on trade union fees.

It was felt that expanded remit of any new professional body may lead to the review of the current levels of contributions in order to be able to support the work of the body. For instance, if the current levels of training available to teachers were also to be reflected in the wider professions, there would be implications for registration fees.

Other issues - appointment of the professional body

One focus group raised the issue of how the new professional body itself would be appointed and recruited. The group stated that they would like to see a **transparent, democratic process of recruitment**, suggesting that the Assembly itself should be involved in the recruitment process, not only the government of the day.

List of focus groups:

Wrexham Youth Service

UNISON



Children and Young People Committee

Consultation on the Education (Wales) Bill: post-16 SEN provision

Summary of evidence from focus groups

This briefing has been produced by the Research Service for use by the Children and Young People Committee.

For further information, contact Gareth England in the Research Service
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Background

During September 2013, as part of the Children and Young People Committee's consultation on the **Education (Wales) Bill**, the National Assembly's Outreach Team conducted a number of focus groups to seek views on the post-16 SEN provision aspect of the Bill, namely the **provisions relating to the post-16 assessment of additional educational and training needs**. These provisions propose to give local authorities extra responsibilities for assessing the needs of, and securing provision for, post-16 learners with additional learning needs.

Focus groups were held in north and south Wales, with the Outreach team targeting special educational needs co-ordinators within schools and staff within local authority education departments who could be affected by the provisions. Thirteen local authority departments were contacted to take part in the focus groups. Time constraints on the part of the target audience and difficulties associated with holding a consultation during the summer months meant that a number of the contacted organisations were unable to take part in the focus group programme.

Four focus groups were held involving five separate participant local authorities: **Carmarthenshire, Flintshire, Monmouthshire, Rhondda Cynon Taf** and **Wrexham**. The focus group participants encompassed a broad range of professionals working in the field of SEN within the authorities, including SEN co-ordinators, Heads of Service and educational psychologists. **In total there were 24 participants.**

The following section provides a summary of the main findings.



Post-16 SEN provision

Question 1 - Do you believe that there are any problems with the way that specialist post-16 provision is currently assessed and then provided, and if so, what are these?

There were a number of key themes which arose in response to this question. These included **cross-agency working** including the communication between local authorities, schools and Careers Wales. It was noted by one group that there were often issues with communication between parties meaning that not everyone was always kept in the loop. One group noted that communications were far better between schools and local authorities than between schools and Careers Wales.

The role of **Careers Wales** itself also produced some comment, with one group heavily reliant on their expertise to place students, feeling that they (CW) were being required to deal with an increased workload with reduced funding. Another group stated that bringing the role of Careers Wales within the local authority would effectively create a whole new department, but that logistically it could make the whole process more streamlined; the main issues would be **acquiring the relevant expertise within the local authority**. The lack of a legal framework when handing over responsibility for young people in transition to Careers Wales was also raised as an issue. Previous proposals for a 'key worker' who would support students during this transition phase were mentioned by one group as something which would improve the current situation.

The issue of **timing** also arose, with two groups noting that the time elapsed between applications for placements and late decisions to fund them created problems, and the late stating of a significant number of statements meant that many were made just prior to the beginning of the school term. This had implications in attempting to provide the necessary places, creating uncertainty for students and their families.

Capacity issues were also identified in this section, with one group stating that school SEN co-ordinators were stretched. It was noted that some students without a previous statement will require assessment prior to post-16 education and that this can cause pressures in time and resources for local authorities. The disparity in level of support for school-age and post-16 SEN was also raised as an issue, with one group stating that those identified at an early age were supported better.

Question 2 - What impact do you think giving local authorities a greater role in respect of post-16 learners will potentially have?

A number of broad themes arose from this question, with general consensus between groups on the main effects of any greater role for local authorities. The main issues were those of the **capacity** and **financial implications** of the proposals.

A number of groups noted that having to assess students up until the age of 25 would mean a significant increase in workload, with one group saying that currently they would



have no capacity to carry out the role. Most groups felt that there was a need for **scrutiny of the financial impact of the plans** as any additional workload would have an effect on budgets.

The issue of **staff expertise** was also mentioned by a number of groups. Many felt that the expertise was currently not in place within the local authority to enable it to carry out the wider remit of the Bill. The lack of specialised staff in key roles e.g. educational psychologists, were also mentioned. The expertise currently provided by Careers Wales and the difficulties in replicating this work within local authorities was also outlined. One group stated that local authorities would probably be best-placed to carry out this work but it would require significant investment in staff and development of new expertise. As a result of this, the **training** available to develop existing staff and bridge the existing skills gap in local authorities was also raised by groups as a key factor. The **nature of the assessment** itself was also raised by one group in this context, with a lack of clarity about what information would be required as part of assessing SEN up until the age of 25.

Multi-agency working was raised by the groups, with many stating that currently many local authorities did much of this work on a consortium-led basis. This involves working with other local authorities as well as health professionals, social services departments and Careers Wales. There were comments about how the proposals would affect arrangements such as these, and one group agreed that multi-agency working should be included on the face of the bill to ensure consistency. There were also concerns that the local knowledge of Careers Wales could be lost and some groups felt that CW should still have a role to play under any new plans.

For a number of groups, **cross-border working** was also an issue. It was felt that it was unclear what effect the provisions would have if a young person moved to another local authority or to England.

Groups also commented on the lack of clarity with regards to **transition**. One group sought clarification on the cut-off point between child and adult services and there were also queries in relation to whose responsibility it would be to provide statements in certain circumstances, e.g. if a student wanted to go to work at post-16 and post-25 statements.

Question 3 – Mainstream further education colleges that can meet the needs of SEN learners can apply directly to the Welsh Government for supplementary funding to meet the needs of learners rather than going through local councils for funding. The Welsh Government wants supplementary funding applications to continue in this way. Do you have any views on this?

There were differing views between groups on this question. One group felt that the less that had to be managed centrally by the local authority, the better, with another group expressing a preference for carrying on with the current system but with improved planning and ring-fenced funding in place.



However, another group stated that if the purpose of the Bill was to bring the duty of post-16 SEN provision under local authority auspices, then any resources for applications for supplementary funding should also be put in their hands. Discrepancies in general as regards the funding provided to SEN learners were also raised by one group.

Question 4 – The provisions in the Bill in respect of Post-16 are one part of a wider consultation held in 2012 about reforming the SEN framework and giving the concept of ‘additional learning needs’ a legal footing. Do you have any views on whether all of this should have been combined in one piece of legislation rather than the post-16 elements being taken forward separately in the Education (Wales) Bill?

All groups felt that all provisions relating to SEN would have been best incorporated in **one piece of legislation** which could highlight the wider reform of the SEN framework. However, one group acknowledged that such a piece of legislation had the potential to be ‘colossal’.

Question 5 – Are there any comments you wish to make on the way in which learners’ needs are met, in particular post-16?

Two groups raised the importance of **local provision** and expressed an opinion that more should be available throughout Wales. Some felt that there was limited availability; whilst the expertise was available in Wales, the physical capacity was not. Another group said that it was a minority of students who had issues finding a suitable course, but that there were issues with some young people having to travel some distance to get their needs met and that there were issues surrounding Welsh language provision.

It was mentioned by one group that there are no **residential spaces** available to young people in Wales, and as such, students requiring residential space in school or college post-16 would have to go to England possibly leading to displacement of the young person from their community, family and the wider services available to young people within their local authority.

The variety of the **curriculum** available to post-16 SEN learners was an issue raised by some of the participants who felt that there should be more ‘vocational’ courses available. Another group commented that there was an under-representation of courses available to those with particular conditions, e.g. Autistic Spectrum Disorder. They also raised the importance of future-proofing post-16 SEN provision so that in years to come, services are appropriate to those with the most severe physical and cognitive disabilities. Currently very few spaces are available to such young people.

Other issues raised were the **‘grey area’ of post-16 young people without statements**; that the importance of SEN provision in providing respite to parents should be reflected in the Bill; and that many parents were not ready to accept that a child has a statement of



SEN and requested that their child attended mainstream education which was not always possible.

In addition, a number of issues arose in response to this question that had previously been mentioned. The issue of **transition** between child and adult services was mentioned again, with two groups re-stating the advantages that having a 'key worker' at this stage would present. There was a feeling that the transition needs to be seamless. Similarly the importance of better multi-agency working, consortia and greater collaboration was also seen as important by three of the groups. The benefit of the specialist knowledge of the Careers Wales regional hubs was also mentioned.

Question 6 – What changes would you like to see the Welsh Government make?

A number of the groups responded to this question in relation to the Bill. One restated the fact that a **full financial risk assessment** would need to be taken with relation to the viability of the Bill, particularly with relation to possible challenges and tribunal where the local authority decide against assessing for SEN. Another called for more robust **consultation**, particularly with parents of young people with SEN. Other participants called for adequate time to be left between the introductions of each reform so that the services involved had time to analyse their effectiveness.

Other groups stated that they would like to see **consistency in the Welsh Government's legislative approach**; that legislation should tie in codes of practice, frameworks, Statutory Instruments and cross-agency working. The issue of compatibility with the legislation with England for students who cross the border to study was also raised.

With relation to the curriculum, there were calls for the Welsh Government to apply pressure on colleges to provide a broader range of courses and a more suitable curriculum for post-16 SEN/ALN students. Another group wanted the Welsh Government to understand the difficulties associated with multi-agency working. There were also comments from one group about the funding available for specialist SEN/ALN projects being 'too inflexible' and that it should be easier to apply for.

There were also more general calls on the Welsh Government to ensure that local authorities had the financial and physical capacity to carry out their duties with respect to SEN and to ensure adequate training is provided to local authorities.

List of focus groups:

Carmarthenshire County Council

Monmouthshire County Council

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

Wrexham County Borough Council and Flintshire County Council

