



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

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[The Public Accounts Committee](#)

27/3/2017

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w tystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mohammad Asghar Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Neil Hamilton Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Cymru UKIP Wales
Neil McEvoy Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Rhianon Passmore Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Nick Ramsay Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Welsh Conservatives (Committee Chair)
Lee Waters Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Nick Batchelar	Cyfarwyddwr Arweiniol (Dinas a Sir Caerdydd) Gwasanaeth Addysg ar y Cyd Consortiwm Canolbarth y De Lead Director (City and County of Cardiff) Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
Simon Brown	Cyfarwyddwr Strategol, Estyn Strategic Director, Estyn
Mark Campion	Arolygydd EM, Estyn HM Inspector, Estyn
Betsan O'Connor	Rheolwr Gyfarwyddwr, Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith Managing Director, Education through Regional Working

Debbie Hartevelde	Rheolwr Gyfarwyddwr, Gwasanaeth Cyrhaeddiad Addysg De-ddwyrain Cymru Managing Director, South East Wales Education Achievement Service
Dermot McChrystal	Cyfarwyddwr Arweiniol (Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Torfaen) Gwasanaeth Cyrhaeddiad Addysg De-ddwyrain Cymru Lead Director (Torfaen County Borough Council) South East Wales Education Achievement Service
Gareth Jones	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office
Matthew Mortlock	Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru Wales Audit Office
Clive Phillips	Cyfarwyddwr Cynorthwyol, Estyn Assistant Director, Estyn
Barry Rees	Is-Gyfarwyddwr Arweiniol (Ceredigion), Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith Vice-Lead Director (Ceredigion) Education through Regional Working
Arwyn Thomas	Rheolwr Gyfarwyddwr Dros Dro, Gwasanaeth Effeithiolrwydd a Gwella Ysgolion Rhanbarthol Gogledd Cymru Interim Managing Director, Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales
Huw Vaughan Thomas	Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru Auditor General for Wales
Hannah Woodhouse	Rheolwr Gyfarwyddwr, Gwasanaeth Addysg ar y Cyd Consortiwm Canolbarth y De Managing Director, Central South Consortium Joint Education Service

**Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance**

Claire Griffiths	Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk
Meriel Singleton	Clerc Clerk
Katie Wyatt	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 14:00.
The meeting began at 14:00.*

**Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau
Introductions, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest**

[1] **Nick Ramsay:** Can I welcome Members to this afternoon's meeting of the Public Accounts Committee? Headsets are available for translation and for sound amplification. Could Members please turn off any electronic devices or ensure they're on silent? In the event of an emergency, please follow directions from the ushers. We've received one apology this afternoon, from Mike Hedges, and there is no substitute. Can I ask at this point: do Members have any declarations of registrable interests that you would wish to declare? No. Okay.

[2] **Neil McEvoy:** Chair, shall I declare that I'm a county councillor in Cardiff? Is that relevant? It could be with one of the people giving evidence. So, I'll declare that.

[3] **Nick Ramsay:** Thank you, Neil McEvoy, for that declaration.

14:01

**Papurau i'w Nodi
Papers to Note**

[4] **Nick Ramsay:** Item 2, papers to note, and first of all the minutes from the meeting held on 13 March. Happy to agree those? Also, we have a letter

from the Welsh Government from 9 March on community safety in Wales. Can Members note that letter, and also agree to consider the findings and recommendations when available in the autumn term? I will write to the Welsh Government requesting early sight of the report at the relevant point.

[5] Good. Okay. Also, we have a letter from Boots from 9 March on medicines management in the pack. Are Members happy to note that letter? Good.

14:02

Consortia Addysg Rhanbarthol: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 1 **Regional Education Consortia: Evidence Session 1**

[6] **Nick Ramsay:** Item 3, the substantive issue of today: the regional education consortia, and evidence session 1. Can I welcome our large cohort of witnesses today? Thank you for agreeing to be with us. We do have a large number of questions for you. Clearly, there are quite a significant number of you, so if at any point I'm moving things on, it's just so that we can cover as wide an area as possible.

[7] I will kick off with the first questions. Can I ask you: taking into account the development of the consortia to date, and thinking of lessons for wider regional working, what would you do differently if you were starting now? Who would like to take that? Barry Rees.

[8] **Mr Rees:** Diolch. Gwnaf fi ateb **Mr Rees:** Thank you. I'll answer in yn Gymraeg. Welsh.

[9] Diolch am y cwestiwn. I Thank you for the question. To start gychwyn gyda'r atebion ar ran un o'r with the answer on behalf of one of cyfarwyddwyr, mi oedd e yn bwysig the directors, it was very important iawn ein bod ni yn gweithredu i that we acted according to a clear fandad clir, ac mi ddaeth y mandad mandate, and that came through the yna trwy'r model cenedlaethol. Mi national model. That set out clear oedd hwnnw yn gosod paramedrau parameters for action, for us, in clir o ran gweithredu, i ni, o ran terms of educational improvement. It gwelliant addysgol. Roedd e'n sôn mentioned support and challenge, am gymorth a her, roedd e'n sôn am improvements to teaching and welliannau i addysgu dysgu, ac mi learning, and it also mentioned oedd e'n sôn am welliannau i improvements in terms of leadership

arweinyddiaeth mewn ysgolion. Felly, in schools. So, acting on that
o weithredu ar y mandad yna, rydw mandate, I think that the initial clarity
i'n credu bod yr eglurder cychwynnol is a good area to start with.
yn faes da i'w gychwyn.

[10] Rwy'n credu ein bod ni—y I think that all of the consortia have
consortia i gyd—wedi esblygu mewn evolved in different ways, and so if
gwahanol ffyrdd, ac felly pe byddai there were any lessons to be learned
unrhyw wers o hynny, rwy'n credu y from that, then I think that those
byddai'r sgyrsiau cychwynnol hynny initial discussions about what
ynglŷn â pha gyfeiriad a pha fath o direction and what kind of
gyfansoddiad sydd ei angen i'r constitution is needed for the four
pedwar consortiwm, sy'n dra consortia, which are very different
gwahanol i'w gilydd o ran from one another in terms of
demograffeg, o ran daearyddiaeth, ac demographics, geography and so
ati—. Mi ddigwyddodd y rheini, ond on—. They did take place, but if we
pe byddem ni'n gwneud hynny eto, were to do that again, then I think
rydw i'n credu y byddem ni yn that we would invest a little bit more
sicrhau buddsoddi ychydig mwy o time in setting out those
amser, efallai, i osod y trefniadau yna arrangements.
yn eu lle.

[11] **Nick Ramsay:** Can I ask you: what are your views on the best fit for the regional delivery of education improvement services? Is consistency desirable, or is there room for regional variation?

[12] **Mr Rees:** A ydy hwn yn ôl i fi **Mr Rees:** Is that back to me again?
eto, neu—?

[13] **Nick Ramsay:** Who'd like to—? Debbie Hartevelde.

[14] **Ms Hartevelde:** I'm happy to take that. Whilst Barry mentioned that we are working, obviously, to a common model, the national model, I think we would all agree that having the ability to have some freedom within that national model, to be able to deliver on local agendas, has been critically important. It certainly has within our region and we evolve that working over time. In saying that, we all work to the overarching philosophy and the remit within the national model, but, again, we've addressed that in slightly different ways, but all aiming for the same ultimate goal, which is improvement in outcomes for our learners. So, I think it's important that there is some ability to be flexible within that model.

[15] **Nick Ramsay:** And you think there is sufficient flexibility within the current arrangement.

[16] **Ms Hartevelde:** I think, from our perspective, we found that that certainly has worked to our advantage in a positive way, certainly within the region of the south-east, yes.

[17] **Nick Ramsay:** Great, okay. Rhianon Passmore.

[18] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. In the light of the Welsh Government's White Paper with regard to regional working in particular, what do you see are the risks and benefits of any changes to the regional footprint? And, obviously there is conversation around the Bridgend situation, which is startling: the number of different non-coterminous wider footprints. I don't know who would like to take that first. If we could talk about risks first of all and possibly then any benefits of this, if there are perceived to be any in terms of any changes.

[19] **Mr Batchelar:** I think one thing I'd like to say in response to that is that it's important that, in relation to educational improvement, we keep a focus on improving outcomes in schools and improving practice in schools, and not on fixing a structural problem in local government. Where the two align, that's all well and good and I think what the answer to your first question shows is a reasonably good alignment between two very specific areas of service delivery that the consortia have delivered: namely, support and challenge to schools, and the responsibility for improving the professional development of teachers and leadership development. It doesn't necessarily follow that structural alignment that will, in a way, address the issues that are thrown up by the number of local authorities that we have currently will drive improvement. School improvement is an outcome of lots of different activities; it's not an activity in itself, and it would be a fallacy to think that you can group all the services that drive school improvement in one place and ergo you will have a more powerful machine for school improvement. I don't think that follows.

[20] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay. So, you would see there's more risk attached to that. Could there be any potential benefit to changing a current regional footprint, as is?

[21] **Mr Batchelar:** There are risks and there are potentially benefits. One

risk is doing something that, in a way, erodes the very positive progress that's been made in placing more responsibility for school improvement in the hands of school leaders and people who work in schools. A potential benefit is clearly in terms of economies of scale and that's not to be dismissed at all. Clearly, with the prospect of even greater financial pressure on local authorities, it's imperative that we get good value. But I don't think—. Again, it seems to me, the key cautionary note I'd like to strike is that there's a set of problems that arise from the structure of local government; there's a separate set of problems that are to do with whether we've got an education system that's got the capacity to go on improving and to deliver, on a sustainable basis, improving outcomes. We shouldn't confuse the two issues; they have points of connection, but they're not symmetrical.

[22] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, in the light that this is a wider context—. I mean, I don't know what the other consortia's views would be around any potential tinkering around regional footprints for the current consortia. I don't know whether EAS has got a view on that, in terms of how that could potentially affect the embedding of current systems and structures.

[23] **Mr McChrystal:** I think I'll go back, Chair, if I can, to Barry's point, which is really about having clarity of why we're trying to achieve what we're trying to achieve. So, tinkering wouldn't be the way that we would hope that things would be introduced. It would be with a clear vision of what we're trying to achieve and what benefits that's going to bring for children and for schools. So, I think, you know—and it's already been said—there is potential there for us to do more as a region, together, and we've put mechanisms in place that would enable that to happen. That's what regional working's about. But, at the moment, that vision hasn't been articulated, and, ultimately, I think that's going to be a political decision. Our job is to make sure that all the mechanisms that could be in place are in place to make that work if that's the decision that's made.

[24] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, in regard to where we currently are, you would see—I may be putting words into mouths and I'm looking for some input here—that the current structures, in particular to the EAS, would be the ones that would embed those outcomes that we're all discussing and want for our young people?

[25] **Ms Harteveld:** I think that what we currently have within EAS regions specifically is a maturing system. I think we have reached a point where our

governance structures are now sound, and we learn as we go. Again, we're still an early institution—really, we're in the early days. I think, probably, there is room for further discussions on additional services, but, again, we would need to make sure that it was at the right time and the right type of services, and, again, that there was a political decision made within our region to enable that to happen.

[26] **Mr A. Thomas:** Fe wnaif i siarad yn Gymraeg. Mae'n debyg beth fyddem ni'n ategu ydy, fel y mae Barry a Dermot wedi ei ddweud, mae'n rhaid i ni fod yn glir beth yn union—. Mae'n rhaid i ni ddylunio'r gwasanaethau. Os ydym am symud rhagor o wasanaethau'n rhanbarthol, mae'n rhaid i ni ddylunio deilliannau clir ar gyfer y gwasanaethau penodol yna. Rydym ni'n sôn am wasanaethau ar gyfer disgyblion bregus yn aml iawn, sydd ag anghenion dysgu ychwanegol, a chynhwysiant.

Mr A. Thomas: I'll be speaking in Welsh. What I would echo is, as Barry and Dermot have said, we have to be clear what exactly—. We have to design the services. If we want to move more services onto a regional basis, we need to identify clear outcomes for those services. We're talking about services for often vulnerable pupils, who have additional learning needs, and inclusion.

[27] Mae rheini'n gorwedd mewn gwahanol ffyrdd mewn awdurdodau lleol a hefyd yn gorwedd yn y maes iechyd. Felly, wrth i ni symud i drafod beth a ddylai'r dirwedd fod ar gyfer gwasanaethau ehangach, rydw i'n meddwl ei fod yn dod yn ehangach na gwasanaethau awdurdodau lleol hefyd, o bosib, oherwydd mae'r cyfrifoldeb am ein disgyblion mwyaf bregus ni yn aml yn bartneriaeth dair ffordd rhwng yr ysgol, yr awdurdod lleol, ac iechyd. Felly, mae'n drafodaeth ehangach na dim ond datblygu set o wasanaethau addysg eithaf cyfyng, o bosib, ar gyfer y mwyafrif o ddisgyblion.

Those lie in different ways in different authorities and also lie in the health area. So, as we move to discuss what the landscape should be for services on a broader basis, I think it goes broader than local authority services as well, perhaps, because the responsibility for our most vulnerable pupils is often a three-way partnership between the school, the local authority, and health. So, it's a broader discussion than just developing education services in a narrow way, perhaps, for the majority of pupils.

[28] **Rhianon Passmore:** Chair, if I may, in regard, then, to ensuring

effective co-ordination and alignment between local and regional plans on school improvements and local and regional working—your experiences to date in this regard, what lessons would you share in terms of the work that’s been undertaken since the inception of regional consortia?

[29] **Ms Woodhouse:** I think, for my part, you’ve got to be clear about what you’re trying to do. So, I think you need to be really clear about what is the success measure of the model that you’re delivering. And, are we clear, collectively, across—in my case, five authorities—about what we’re doing? Are we clear about what ‘good’ looks like? Are we clear about the path to get there? And then it becomes a question of good implementation and delivery. I think what colleagues are saying is that when and if we’re clear about the move towards wider services and the footprints, then we can put in place mechanisms to deliver that. That process is out for consultation at the moment and it is a political decision. So, for me, it’s clarity.

[30] I think the other one—. We need to be very careful. You asked about risks and benefits of regional working—for me, one of the big issues is about churn. We have few enough good school leaders in the country; we have few enough people in terms of leadership of services. We need to make sure that we keep those good people we have and continue to build on and develop them. The risk of churn is a risk of destabilising the good people we have. And so I think setting out a really clear path into the medium term that gives people security is important. Talent management is a point that was raised by the auditor general, and I think he was right to have reflected that.

[31] **Rhianon Passmore:** We’ll be coming to those particular issues. Are there any other comments from anyone else in that regard?

[32] **Ms O’Connor:** O rancynllunio yn yr hirdymor, y ffaith ein bod ni wedi gallu rhannu’r cynlluniau yna, a sut rŷm ni’n cynllunio—. Eto, wrth ymateb i un o’r argymhellion y cawsom ni oddi wrth Estyn ac oddi wrth y swyddfa archwilio, rŷm ni wedi gweithio gyda’n gilydd i sicrhau bod yr arferion gorau’n cael eu defnyddio o ran cynllunio, ac mae hynny o ran cynllunio rhwng awdurdodau lleol o fewn ein rhanbarth ni yn ERW, neu **Ms O’Connor:** In terms of long-term planning, the fact that we’ve been able to share those plans and how we are planning—. In response to one of the recommendations that we had from Estyn and from the audit office, we have been able to work together to ensure that best practice is used in terms of planning, and that’s in terms of planning between local authorities within our region in ERW, or between regions. So, we have used

rhwng rhanbarthau. Felly, rŷm ni wedi defnyddio'r arfer orau, wedyn, o ran sut rŷm ni'n sicrhau bod aelodau etholedig yn cael eu llais wedi clywed yn deg, sut rŷm ni'n gwella systemau sgrwtini, er enghraifft, a sut rŷm ni'n cynllunio'n ariannol. Felly, mae'r gwelliannau yna yn rhai rŷm ni wedi gweithio arnyn nhw dros gyfnod. Fel yr oedd Debbie yn ei ddweud, rŷm ni'n gyrff cymharol newydd, felly roedd angen i ni fynd drwy'r broses yna a gwella'r ffordd rŷm ni'n gweithio, ac rwy'n credu ein bod ni wedi gwneud camau breision. Mae'n dal i fod gwaith gyda ni i wneud eto i wella, ond rŷm ni'n hyderus ein bod ni wedi gwneud cynnydd.

14:15

[33] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee Waters.

[34] **Lee Waters:** Can I just follow up on that? I'm just wondering how you're evaluating how that best practice is an example of good, and how that's being spread out.

[35] **Ms O'Connor:** O ran gweithio gyda'n gilydd, rŷm ni'n rhannu'r arferion gorau yna gyda'n gilydd. Ond hefyd, wrth gwrs, o edrych ar ddeilliannau, y ddau brif deilliant byddwn i'n defnyddio yw ein deilliannau ni ar lefel dau '*plus*'. Felly, rŷm ni wedi gweld cynnydd a chyflymder yng nghynnydd y gwelliant o fewn ysgolion yng nghyfnod allweddol 4, ond hefyd yn fwy i'n disgyblion bregus ni. Pan fyddem ni'n dod yn ôl i'r sgysiau, fel yr oedd Arwyn yn sôn ynghynt, o ran

that best practice in terms of how we ensure that elected members have their voices heard, how we improve scrutiny systems, for example, and how we plan financially. So, those are improvements that we've worked on over time. We are fairly new bodies, so we have to go through that process and improve the way that we do work, and I think that we have taken big steps. We still have some improvement work to do, but we're confident that we have made progress.

Ms O'Connor: In terms of working together, we do share that best practice. But, in looking at outcomes, the two main outcomes that I would use are our outcomes at level two plus. So, we have seen progress and pace in that improvement within schools in key stage 4, but also more for our vulnerable pupils. When we come back to those conversations, as Arwyn was saying earlier, about ensuring that those most vulnerable children in school improve, we have seen progress as well for those

sicrhau bod y plant mwyaf bregus yn y system yn gwella, rŷm ni wedi gweld cynnydd hefyd i'r plant hynny. O ran codi capasiti ysgolion, mae'r system categoreiddio rŷm ni i gyd wedi bod yn rhan o'i ddatblygu, rŷm ni'n dal yn gallu gweld ar yr ail farn ac ar y drydedd farn ein bod ni'n gweld cynnydd o ran capasiti o fewn ein hysgolion ni o ran arweinyddiaeth yn cryfhau, safonau dysgu ac addysgu yn gwella, ac mae ein 'match' ni hefyd, gyda barnau Estyn, yn un o'r pethau rŷm ni'n gweld fel cynnydd. Felly, dros y ddwy neu dair blynedd diwethaf, byddwn i'n defnyddio'r tri dangosydd yna fel dangosyddion o impact.

children. In terms of raising schools' capacity, the categorisation system we've all been part of developing, we can still see on the second and third opinion that we're seeing an increase in terms of capacity within schools in terms of leadership strengthening, teaching and learning standards improving, and also our match with Estyn's opinions is one of the things that we see as progress. So, over the past two or three years, I would use those three indicators as the impact indicators.

[36] **Lee Waters:** So, that's looking at data within ERW for what's effective and tracking that. I was thinking more about how you're comparing success between the different consortia. So, for example, I'm aware that the Central South Consortium school improvement model is a bottom-up model. As I understand it, it's school-to-school working, which sounds very interesting; I'd like to hear some more about that. Is that something other consortia are doing as well, and how are you judging the variable approaches and which works best?

[37] **Ms O'Connor:** Mae yna ddau ymagwedd, rydw i'n credu. O ran ein systemau llywodraethu ni, maen nhw'n wahanol iawn o ran y pedwar rhanbarth. Mae sut rŷm ni wedi'n gosod, sut rŷm ni wedi cael ein llunio, yn wahanol. Ond, o ran y gwaith, fel yr oedd Barry'n ei ddweud, o ran codi capasiti arweinyddiaeth, a dysgu ac addysgu, ac o ran cymorth a her i ysgolion—yn hynny o beth, mae'r pedwar rhanbarth wedi datblygu system

Ms O'Connor: There are two approaches, I think. In terms of our governance systems, they are very different in terms of the four regions. How we have been set out and how we have been formed are very different. But, in terms of the work, as Barry was saying, in terms of raising leadership capacity, teaching and learning, and in terms of challenge and support for schools—in that regard, the four regions have developed a self-improvement

hunanwella o ran codi rôl ysgolion o fewn gwella eu hunain. Mae hynny'n rhywbeth sy'n gyffredin i'r pedwar rhanbarth, byddwn i'n dweud.

[38] **Mr A. Thomas:** Byddwn i'n ychwanegu at hynny hefyd. Rydym ni fel pedwar rheolwr cyfarwyddwr yn cyfarfod yn fisol, rydym ni'n cael trafodaethau misol am effeithiau gwahanol. Rydych chi'n cael tystiolaeth nesaf, rydw i'n deall, gan ein cyfeillion ni o Estyn; rydym ni hefyd yn cyfarfod yn dymhorol efo ein harolygwyr lleol ni ar lefel awdurdod ac ar lefel consortia. Mae'r argymhellion sydd wedi cael eu gadael gan y tîm yn fan acw a gan Estyn yn naturiol yn bethau rŷm ni'n eu trafod yn rheolaidd, felly rydym ni yn trafod y cynnydd yn erbyn yr argymhellion hynny yn rheolaidd, ac rydym ni'n rhannu hynny wedyn ymysg ein gilydd. Mae yna gyfres gennym ni o gydweithio ar lefel y pedwar rheolwr gyfarwyddwr, ein staff busnes ni, ac ein ymgynghorwyr ni, i rannu'r arferion hynny ar draws, felly rydym ni'n datblygu proses, wedyn, o weithio efo'n gilydd sydd wedyn yn symud yr arfer orau yna o gwmpas y cyfundrefn.

system in terms of raising the role of schools within self-improvement. That's something that is common to all four regions, I would say.

Mr A. Thomas: I would add to that as well. As the four directors, we meet on a monthly basis and we have monthly discussions about the different impacts. You're having evidence next, I understand, from our colleagues in Estyn, and we also meet on a termly basis with our local inspectors on an authority and consortium level. The recommendations that have been left by the team there and by Estyn are naturally things that we discuss regularly, so we do discuss the progress against the recommendations regularly, and we share that between ourselves. We have a series of collaborations in terms of the regional directors, our business staff, and our consultants, to share those practices, so we do develop a process of collaborating that then moves the practice around the regime.

[39] **Lee Waters:** Could Hannah Woodhouse tell us a little bit about the approach that they take, please?

[40] **Ms Woodhouse:** Yes. We have a strategy that is based on the premise that teachers learn better when they work with other teachers, and they talk about teaching with other teachers rather than through us. You'll probably refer to the survey shared with the papers—we don't provide courses any longer, we fund schools to work together across each other, and all four

consortia do that in different ways. In our region, that's based on discussions with international experts and evidence, and, again, in other regions, working in different ways, drawing on the evidence. We've created a number of different strategies in our regions. We've got four models: one is about schools working together through school improvement groups, which is good practice sharing at a low level, because there's not huge amounts of funding. Then we've got school-to-school partnerships, which we call pathfinders, which is about schools collaborating on a specific item of practice. Then we have what we call peer inquiry, which is based on a peer review model, which is used across lots of industry, which is really headteachers spending time in each other's schools, but with very disciplined protocols and processes around that. Then we have our school improvement hubs, which—again, all regions will have very similar models—are about our investing in, for example, a lead modern foreign language school, or lead mathematics schools, or lead schools that are very good at teaching and learning, to teach other schools. And, in terms of your question about how do we know about the impact, it is difficult, because you can't count it very quickly in terms of outcomes. We have got a contract in place through Cardiff University, which is evaluating, in a longitudinal way, the long-term effects on leadership, on teaching and learning, and on outcomes, as well as on pupils and teachers, these strategies, and our adapting. And, again, all regions will have those processes in place.

[41] **Lee Waters:** That sounds very interesting. You mentioned the peer-to-peer learning rather than sending people on courses. But you all do that in your different ways. So, do any of the other consortia take a similar approach to that?

[42] **Mr Rees:** Rwy'n credu ei bod yn bwysig nodi bod partneru ysgolion i ysgolion i rannu profiadau, ac i roi cymorth, yn digwydd ar draws y consortia. Mae gyda ni o fewn ERW rhai ysgolion sydd yn arwain partneriaethau ysgol i ysgol, ond hefyd yn derbyn cymorth gan ysgolion eraill sydd ar draws y consortia. Mae yna enghreifftiau lu o ysgolion, er enghraifft, rhai ysgolion o fewn rhanbarth ERW, sydd weithiau yn ynysig yn broffesiynol, nid oes

Mr Rees: I think it's important to note that school partnering, and getting them to share experiences and give support, happens across the consortia. Within ERW, we have some schools that lead school to school partnerships, but also receive support from other schools across the consortia. There are many examples of schools, for example, some schools within the ERW region, that sometimes are isolated professionally, there's not much

llawer o gyfnewid o athrawon, ac maen nhw wedi mynd ychydig bach yn stêl yn eu arferion efallai, a dyna beth sydd angen iddyn nhw yw cael eu llygaid y tu allan i'w hysgol eu hunain i weld arferion da. Ac rŷm ni fel consortia, a'r rheolwyr gyfarwyddwyr, yn cydweithio er mwyn adnabod ysgolion sydd wedi datblygu sgiliau ac wedi llwyddo yn yr un cyd-destun â'r ysgolion hynny. Felly, mae'n bwysig nodi bod y partneriaethau yma yn digwydd o fewn consortia, ond ar draws y consortia hefyd.

exchange of teachers, and they have become a bit stale in their practices perhaps, and that's what they need to look outside their own school to see good practice. And we, as a consortia, and the managing directors, do work together to identify those schools that have developed skills and have been successful in that same context as those schools. So, it's important to note that these partnerships do happen within the consortia, but across the consortia as well.

[43] **Lee Waters:** So, just to be clear, are you telling me that there's a consistent approach across all the consortia in this regard, or is there variation?

[44] **Ms O'Connor:** Mae yna egwyddor o symud ar hyd y continwmm yma, ond efallai bydd y prosiect ag enw gwahanol, neu efallai delwedd wahanol, oherwydd mae ERW yn 12 sq km; mae *central south* ac EAS yn llai. Mae GwE â rhyw 6 sq km. Felly, mae yna wahaniaeth o ran sut ym ni'n gallu gweithredu pethau, ond, o ran yr egwyddor o symud gwaith o ysgol i ysgol, felly, bydd gyda ni yr un math o beth o ran ysgolion arweiniol. Rŷm ni hefyd yn defnyddio athrawon arweiniol, felly symud yr athrawon gorau o amgylch fel eu bod nhw'n gallu hyfforddi, *coach-o* a mentora pobl benodol. Felly, mae'r un modelau gyda ni ag sydd gyda rhanbarthau eraill.

Ms O'Connor: There is a principle of moving along the continuum, but maybe the project will have a different name, or possibly a different image, because ERW is 12 sq km; central south and EAS are smaller. GwE is about 6 sq km. So, there's a difference in terms of how we can act, but, in terms of the principle of moving work from school to school, then we will have the same kind of thing in terms of lead schools. We also use lead teachers, so, moving the best teachers around so they can train, coach and mentor specific people. So, we have the same models as the other regions have.

[45] **Lee Waters:** But it's the detail here that's crucial, isn't it? You may have

similar concepts that you're approaching, but how is the system—. Say, for example, that South Central Consortium are doing particularly good pioneering work on this—I don't know if they are, but let's assume for the sake of argument that they are—you may be calling what you're doing something similar, and you're getting peer-to-peer working, but how do you know, in terms of the granularity of what you're doing, that you're learning the best practice of what they're doing in south central? What systems—how are you sharing to make sure that the detail is being learned from, rather than just the principles?

[46] **Mr Rees:** Byddwn i'n dadlau mai'r *conduit* gorau ar gyfer hwn yw ADEW, lle mae'r 22 cyfarwyddwr yn dod at ei gilydd yn rheolaidd iawn, ond hefyd, ar ben hynny, mae rheolwyr gyfarwyddwyr bob consortiwm yn ymuno â ni ar gyfer y cyfarfodydd hynny. Felly, lle mae arfer gorau, mi fyddai hynny'n cael ei gyflwyno, ac wedyn, ymhellach i hynny, gyda mandad teulu ADEW, byddem ni'n gofyn i'r rheolwyr gyfarwyddwyr, a'u swyddogion o danyn nhw, i rhwydweithio er mwyn sicrhau bod yr arfer gorau yn cael ei raeadru.

Mr Rees: I would argue that the best conduit for this is the Association of Directors of Education in Wales family, where there are 22 directors coming together on a regular basis, very regularly, but also, managing directors of each consortia join us for those meetings. So, where there is best practice, that would be presented, and then, in addition to that, with the mandate of the ADEW family, we would ask the managing directors, and their officials below them, to network to make sure that that best practice is cascaded.

[47] **Lee Waters:** My slight concern is it all seems very broad and general to me, and I'm not hearing the detail of how that good practice in one cluster, for example, in wherever, is being captured by the system. You say it's based on data, but I'm not really sure how the data are really being measured to enable you to draw those judgments. Perhaps I'm misunderstanding, but I've not got a sense of that, I'm sorry.

[48] **Ms O'Connor:** You start.

[49] **Ms Woodhouse:** I'll give examples. Thank you. I think it is the case that we are looking at where different consortia do things well. So, for example, ERW have done particularly well this last year around core subject performance at GCSE, and have a number of lead practitioners operating across that region. As Betsan said, it is delivered differently because it is a

huge region, and our region is a different region. And I think there is a case for—. We've got big urban areas in our region, we've got valleys in our region. It's very different in terms of moving practice around. The models have to be different. We did send our team to have a look in terms of what the teams there are doing around GCSEs, and they came back and they said, 'Well, we need to readjust in terms of our focus, particularly between lead schools working collectively in the core subjects of maths, English and science', based on the practice that they saw there. And they've also been doing some similar work with the Education Achievement Service.

[50] At the same time, we have a project in place with EAS, which is around looking at closing the gap. Again, both regions have similar needs. And we did a piece of work last year across all of our staff on what works particularly well—you know, with headteachers coming in to talk about what works particularly for deprived people, where we can learn from it and where we can extend it, particularly in post-industrial communities. We have got research in terms of what works well in those sorts of communities, involving schools across both our consortia. It is probably fair to say we do less work with GwE in the north, which is probably a thing about geography, although we're very interested in Welsh-medium leadership provision, which GwE have made a real strength of their model.

[51] So, it's probably fair to say we can do more. There was a self-improving summit last week where we all looked at the models that we have. We shared the models that we have, and we looked at how, nationally, we can develop a self-improving approach across the country. But I think we'd all say we can do more there.

[52] **Nick Ramsay:** Rhianon Passmore.

[53] **Rhianon Passmore:** In that regard, you talked about a summit and sharing information as a result of what we've just heard from Lee Waters. In regard to the White Paper, and I'll come back to that now in terms of governance models and the most appropriate model for regional working, is there a collective view or consensus—and I'm not disregarding the huge differences, topographically and geographically, and in terms of numbers of the different consortia—but do you think what we've got now at the moment is right, bearing in mind the different constitutions, the fact that you've got a limited company and the different models that are out there based against the context of those guidelines for regional working? Is it an optimum level, and are the consortia's governance structures that they currently have, in

your views, fit for purpose?

[54] **Ms Hartevelde:** I think we can talk from our own experiences here; I would feel uncomfortable talking about one of my colleagues and their governance structure. But certainly from the perspective within the south-east region within the EAS, we are slightly different in our governance model to others, and we have honed that over the last four and a half, five years. And I feel, in answer to your question, ‘Is the governance model now fit for purpose?’—I’d like to think it is, and we’ve continued to strengthen that year on year. There’s been stability; I think that’s a key feature within the governance model. It’s likely to change now in the current round of local authority elections, but as it stands currently for us within our context, we feel that that model is serving us well.

[55] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay. I’d like to ask the others, particularly the directors or the managing directors from each consortia, what your view is. I’m not asking you to comment necessarily on your view of the other consortia, but is what you’ve got, in your view, fit for purpose for your area?

[56] **Ms O’Connor:** Rwy’n credu, o ran bod yn debyg i EAS, rŷm ni’n datblygu ac yn esblygu hefyd mewn ffordd hollol wahanol, ond rwy’n credu yn cryfhau ar yr un pryd. Rŷm ni’n edrych ar ddarn o waith ar hyn o bryd lle rŷm ni wedi gwahodd rhywun i mewn i edrych o’r tu allan ar ein system ni, achos rŷm ni’n sylweddoli bod hynny yn amserol ac yn gallu’n helpu ni i baratoi ar gyfer yr hyn sy’n dod gyda’r newidiadau sydd i ddod. Wedi dweud hynny, rwy’n credu mai rhai o’r cryfderau o fewn y system sydd gyda ni yw ein bod ni wedi gallu cydweithio’n agos iawn gydag awdurdodau lleol, oherwydd y model sydd gennym ni, ac mae hynny wedi ein galluogi ni i dynnu pethau o ran anghenion dysgu ychwanegol—cynhwysiant ac yn y blaen, sydd ddim yn bell oddi wrth welliant ysgolion—

Ms O’Connor: I think that, in terms of being similar to EAS, we are developing and evolving as well in a very different way, but I think that we’re strengthening at the same time. We’re looking at a piece of work at present where we’ve invited someone in to look from outside at our system, because we realise that that is timely and it could help us to prepare for what’s coming with the changes that are coming. Having said that, I think that some of the strengths within the system that we have are that we have been able to collaborate very closely with local authorities, because of the model that we have, and that has allowed us, then, to draw in things for ALN—inclusivity and so forth, which are not far removed from school improvement—and I believe that that

ac rwy'n credu bod hynny wedi bod yn gryfder i ni.

has been a strength of ours.

[57] Ar y llaw arall, rwy'n credu mai un o'n heriau ni yw herio'r gwahaniaeth rhwng perfformiad awdurdodau unigol o fewn y rhanbarth, ac mae hynny efallai yn fwy o her i ni. Felly, rwy'n credu bod yna gryfder a gwendid yn ein system ni, ac rwy'n credu ein bod ni'n barod i ymateb gyda'r wybodaeth orau sydd gennym ni, a'n bod ni mewn sefyllfa gryfach nawr nag oeddem ni ddwy neu dair blynedd yn ôl i ymateb i'r her sydd ar y gorwel i ni.

On the other hand, I believe that one of our challenges is to challenge the difference between the performance of individual authorities within the region, and that may be more of a challenge for us. So, I think there is strength and weakness within our system, and I think that we are ready to respond with the best information that we have, and that we're in a stronger position now than we were two or three years ago to respond to the challenges on the horizon.

14:30

[58] **Mr Rees:** Rwy'n credu y byddwn ni yn ategu hynny. Fel cyfarwyddwr, rwy'n credu y byddai'n hollol anymarferol i gael model dra gwahanol i'r hyn sydd gyda ni, oherwydd mae angen i'n swyddogion ni weithio mewn cyd-destun gweddol leol iddyn nhw. Nid oes diben inni gael un cwmni wedi ei leoli mewn un man, dyweder yng Nghaerfyrddin, a gorfod teithio lan i'r Drenewydd a'r Trallwng er mwyn cael gweithredu. Ond mae'r gweithio'n lleol—y swyddogion sydd yn gweithio'n lleol i strategaeth ranbarthol—yn gweithio oherwydd bod y swyddogion hynny yn meithrin perthynas gyda'r ysgolion. Mae rhywfaint o ddilyniant yn hynny. Ond hefyd, mae gweithio mewn consortiwm yn golygu bod pob awdurdod yn cael mynediad at y pwll ehangach o arbenigedd er mwyn

Mr Rees: I think that I would support that. As a director, I think that it would be impractical to have a model that's very different to what we have, because our officials need to work in a fairly local context to them. There's no point for us to have one company located in one place, in Carmarthen, for example, and then having to travel up to Newtown and Welshpool in order to work with them. But that local working—the officials who work locally to a regional strategy—works because those officials do develop a relationship with the schools. There is some progression in that regard. But also, working in a consortium means that each authority has access to the wider pool of expertise in order to tackle the weaknesses that exist, perhaps, within specific schools, where we, perhaps,

mynd i'r afael â'r gwendidau, efallai, o fewn ysgol sydd yn sbesiffig lle na fyddem ni, pe byddem ni ar ein pen ein hunain, wedi gallu cael yr ystod arbenigedd yn lleol. Felly, mae argaeledd drwy'r consortiwm, un, i gael at strategaethau sydd wedi cael eu cytuno'n rhanbarthol, ond hefyd mynediad at arbenigedd sydd cymaint yn ehangach na fyddai unrhyw awdurdod ar ben ei hunan yn medru ei gael.

[59] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee Waters.

[60] **Lee Waters:** There's no doubting the potential is there, but from the auditor general's most recent memoranda, quite clearly, in a number of areas, that potential isn't being realised. So, for example, on the issue of professional development needs, I quote,

[61] 'there has not been any strategic co-ordination across the four consortia to consider whether there can be a shared approach to meeting some of the professional development needs.'

[62] So, that's not doubting the capacity is there, but on the measure of the auditor general, you're still falling short in some significant areas. So, I'm less interested in hearing about the potential, and more interested in hearing what you're going to do about it.

[63] **Mr A. Thomas:** Rydw i'n meddwl bod yr adroddiad yna wedi dyddio, onid ydy? Rydym ni wedi symud ymlaen ers pan oedd hwnnw wedi—rydym ni wedi gweld yr argymhelliad yna ac rydym ni wedi gwrando ar yr argymhelliad yna. Ac fel rydym ni wedi ceisio esbonio yn gynt, rydw i'n meddwl, wrth edrych ar ein—rydym ni'n sôn am y lefel cynllunio, rydym ni wedyn yn sôn ar y lefel weithredol, lle mae'r

Mr A. Thomas: I think that report is dated, isn't it? I think we've moved on since when that was published. We've seen the recommendations and we've listened to the recommendations. And as we've tried to explain previously, I think that in looking at—we're talking about the planning level and the operational level, where challenge advisers come together nationally to discuss strengths and weaknesses. So, we are

ymgynghorwyr her yn genedlaethol wedi bod yn dod at ei gilydd i drafod cryfderau a gwendidau. Felly, rydym ni'n dechrau teimlo bod y trafodaethau yna'n symud yn eu blaen. Rydym ni wedi sôn am rannu rhaglenni arweinyddol ar draws y rhanbarth. Mae sefydlu rŵan yr academi arweinyddiaeth genedlaethol—unwaith eto, mae'r pedwar rhanbarth wedi dod at ei gilydd, wedi rhoi eu rhaglenni i gyd ar y bwrdd i weld beth ydy cryfderau a gwendidau pob un ohonom ni. Felly, gan dderbyn beth mae Huw yn ei adrodd ar bwynt mewn amser, buaswn i'n dweud bod yna symud wedi bod yn eithaf sylweddol ac yn eithaf sydyn ar ambell un o'r argymhellion hynny.

starting to feel that those discussions are moving on. We've talked about sharing leadership programmes across the region. We're establishing the national leadership academy—once again, the four regions have come together and put their programmes on the table to see the strengths and weaknesses of each of us. So, I accept what Huw says about a point in time, but there has been movement, significantly and quite quickly, in terms of some of those recommendations.

[64] **Lee Waters:** So, in terms of the remaining areas where there is work to be done, what have you identified are the remaining gaps for unrealised potential to work strategically?

[65] **Mr A. Thomas:** Gan bigo cwestiwn Rhianon i fyny, rydym ni wedi cael y drafodaeth yn y gogledd, yn naturiol, am yr elfen o lywodraethiant a pha wasanaethau sydd yn gorwedd yn y consortia a pha wasanaethau sydd yn gorwedd, wedyn, yn yr awdurdod lleol. Beth sy'n glir ydy bod pawb eisio mynd ati i gydweithio. Beth rydym ni eisio ei gryfhau ydy bod yn glir beth ydy lefel y gwasanaethau sydd yn gorwedd o fewn yr awdurdod a beth sydd yn y consortia. Mae'n deg dweud bod yna amrywiaeth, wedyn, ym mhob un o'r awdurdodau o sut mae'r

Mr A. Thomas: To pick up on the question that Rhianon asked, we've had that discussion in north Wales, naturally, on that element of governance and what services lie within the consortia and which lie within the local authority. What is clear is that everyone wants to collaborate. What we want to strengthen is to be clear what the level of services that lie within the authority and within the consortia is. It's fair to say that there's variety in each of those local authorities, then, in how those services have been aligned for that discussion.

gwasanaethau yna wedi cael eu cyflunio ar gyfer y drafodaeth yna.

[66] Felly, cymerwch, er enghraifft, y drafodaeth, rŵan, ar les. Mae lles yn dod i mewn i gyfrifoldeb y consortiwm am y tro cyntaf yn ei ehangder. Mae'n rhaid inni drafod yn glir, onid oes, efo'r chwe awdurdod a'r consortia, ond mae'n rhaid inni hefyd dynnu partneriaeth ehangach i mewn yn fannu er mwyn inni fedru diffinio beth yn union ydy rôl pawb?

So, take, for example, the discussion on welfare. That comes into the responsibility of the consortium for the first time. We then have to have that clear discussion with the six authorities and the consortia, but we also have to draw in that wider partnership in order for us to be able to define what exactly the role of each party is.

[67] Felly, beth rydym ni wedi ei ddysgu, mae'n debyg, ydy, o'r man cychwyn lle gwnaeth Barry ddechrau'r cwestiwn cyntaf, fod yn rhaid inni fod yn glir beth ydy rôl pawb, neu mae yna berig inni fod yn dyblygu. Mae'n rhaid inni fod yn glir wedyn, ar ôl gwneud hynny, a diffinio wedyn beth ydy'r daith a sut mae hynny'n dod at ei gilydd. Mae hynny wedyn yn rhoi her inni o ran llywodraethiant, ac mae'r llywodraethiant yna wedyn yn croesi, onid ydy, o chwe awdurdod yn gweithio o gwmpas y consortia i graffu lleol, yn naturiol, ar y gwasanaethau hynny, a thu hwnt, o bosib, ym maes lles? Felly, wrth symud yn ein blaenau, mae'n rhaid inni hefyd fod yn barod, onid oes, i ddiwygio ein llywodraethiant os ydy sgôp beth ydym ni'n ei dderbyn wedyn yn ehangach?

What we've learned, with regard to how Barry started the first question, is that we have to be clear what is everyone's role, so there's no duplication. We then have to be clear, having done that, and define what the journey is and how that comes together. That then gives us a challenge in terms of governance, and that governance crosses over from those six authorities working around the consortia to local scrutiny of those services, clearly, but then beyond that, perhaps, within the area of welfare. Then, moving forward, we have to be ready to revise our governance if there is that wider scope in what we then accept.

[68] **Lee Waters:** So, it's only in governance you think there's scope for more work.

[69] **Mr A. Thomas:** O, gosh, na.

Mr A. Thomas: Oh, gosh, no.

[70] **Lee Waters:** That was my question: what are the areas that you've identified and what are you going to do to address them? You mentioned governance; what are the others?

[71] **Mr A. Thomas:** Reit, os ydych yn edrych ar y blaenoriaethau cenedlaethol yn eithaf clir, mae yna le i godi safonau, yn naturiol— **Mr A. Thomas:** Well, if you look at the national priorities, they are quite clear. There is a place for raising standards.

[72] **Lee Waters:** With respect, I'm not talking about national priorities—I'm talking about within your consortia. You told me that the judgments of the auditor were out of date. Fine. Estyn's judgments of a year ago of your consortia showed considerable room for improvement. Beyond governance, what are the areas you've identified for greater strategic working from your consortia's point of view?

[73] **Nick Ramsay:** And if you can be brief in your answer—*[Inaudible.]*

[74] **Mr A. Thomas:** Codi safonau, yn glir, yn enwedig yn y pynciau craidd—mathemateg, Cymraeg, Saesneg. Mae arweinyddiaeth yn her. Mae adnabod arweinwyr ar gyfer y dyfodol ar bob lefel yn her; mae gennym y Gymraeg a'r Saesneg i ddiwallu y gofynion a darparu ar gyfer y ddwy iaith hynny yn benodol, ac mae gennym ni gwricwlwm newydd ar y gorwel. Felly, mae ein hysgolion ni, ar hyn o bryd, yn delio efo'r cwricwlwm presennol ac yn gorfod cynllunio'r cwricwlwm newydd. Felly, mae yna ystod y bethau yn fannu—heriau—yr ydym yn edrych arnyn nhw fel consortia, ond rydym yn elwa hefyd o rannu efo'r consortia eraill. Mae'n rhaid inni ddyysgu ac i rannu'r maich hwnnw ac i ganfod pobl sydd yn arwain. Er enghraifft, rydym yn cynllunio ar **Mr A. Thomas:** Raising standards, clearly, especially in the core subjects of mathematics, English and Welsh. Leadership is a challenge. Identifying future leaders at all levels is a challenge; we have Welsh and English that meet the needs to provide for both languages specifically; and we have a new curriculum on the horizon. So, our schools currently are dealing with the current curriculum and have to plan for the new curriculum. So, there's a range of things there—challenges—where we are looking at them, as consortia, but we are also benefiting from sharing with the other consortia of learning and sharing that workload and to identify people who are leading. For example, we have 'Successful Futures' planning. Someone from each consortia is leading on each

gyfer 'Dyfodol Llwyddiannus'. Mae yna rywun o bob consortia yn arwain yr elfennau gwahanol. Felly, nid ydym yn cynhyrchu popeth wedyn yn lleol ac yn dyblygu. Rydym wedyn yn rhannu ar draws y pedwar consortia i gynllunio ymlaen ar gyfer y dyfodol.

[75] **Nick Ramsay:** That's fine. Mohammad Asghar.

[76] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair; and thank you, panel. Good afternoon to you. My first question to you: following the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development recent review of education policy in Wales, it was suggested that regional consortia should continue—and this is their quote now—

[77] 'to invest in their own capacity and strengthen the evidence base for their school improvement services'.

[78] Quote closed. Given this, what investments are currently being made to develop this capacity, and what do you see as the key challenges ahead of funding in order to enhance school improvement services? All of you can answer. Hannah.

[79] **Ms Woodhouse:** I'll make a start. So, I mentioned already that I think it is the case—I think it is the case, actually, across the UK that there's a need to invest in evaluative capacity in terms of school improvement: what works, as opposed to what is seen to be the sort of latest policy. That's as true for us as it is for anybody else. What we have done in our region is very narrowly invested quite a significant sum of money in a research and evaluation tender, which has gone to, as was mentioned, Cardiff University, who are not evaluating our work. They're working with my team so that we are better at evaluating our own work, and they're building our evaluative capacity. So, we've done that.

[80] But I think, more importantly, for our work particularly, is that headteachers who are leading school-to-school work are very clear about when you're starting work with another school, it's 'Where are we now in terms of our impact, and where do we want to get to?', so that we build that in at the start of that work, so building the evaluative capacity of school leaders when they work collectively. So, we're asking about impact from the

beginning rather than getting to the end and then saying, 'Well, what was the impact of that?' It shouldn't be stifling. I think often we measure overly, in my view. It should be about enhancing the quality of the work that we're doing collectively. So, we have invested, specifically, money into that contract but we are investing a lot of time into the evaluative skills of headteachers as they work together to do that work.

[81] **Mohammad Asghar:** The thing is, you're looking to your experience to date of regional working.

[82] **Ms Woodhouse:** Yes.

[83] **Mohammad Asghar:** What lesson would you share with the committee and other public services about the key challenges in respect of certain areas—school improvement, education improvement services and business financial planning? And finally, how do councillors and local authority staff and consortia staff balance their responsibilities to their local areas and the regions?

[84] **Ms Hartevelde:** Shall I pick that up? There were a lot of points in there. If I just—if it's okay with you—backtrack slightly just on the question about research because, very similar to the work that Hannah has described in central-south, we also, in the south-east region, have invested heavily over the last year in partnerships with our universities through processes of tender to enable us, again, to learn from the outset about what works well nationally and internationally, and through that we hope to gain efficiencies in the way we work, but, also, there is value in definitely building relationships with our research partners. The challenges I see that we face going forward regionally through our business plans are around consistency and ensuring that we are able to give consistent messages into the workforce—and I mean the workforce in general, schools, governors and particularly with our staff—so that we're able to retain and attract well-qualified staff, both within our region and within our school setting. Part of that is around the work that we've done collectively with other partners around encouraging teachers to come to teach in Wales—that it's an exciting place to come.

[85] The other challenges are, of course, around the certainty of financial planning so that we are able to plan systematically on a three-year basis and that we are able to share those plans with our workforce, particularly with our headteachers, so that we really do have a collective approach to the way

in which we work, going forward. The challenges are always for us to be able to strengthen the work that we've already done cross-regionally so that we do look for those efficiencies and not reinvent the wheel four times over. Again, that still remains a challenge for us, although we've made some inroads with that way of working.

[86] **Ms O'Connor:** Un o'r darnau penodol o waith—. Mae Debbie a Hannah wedi sôn am bethau unigol rŷm ni yn eu gwneud, ac mae yna enghreifftiau penodol—er enghraifft, rŷm ni wedi edrych ar bwysau gwaith a marcio, ac roedd gwella *feedback* i ddisgyblion yn un o'r pethau roedd yn flaenoriaeth o fewn cynllun busnes ERW. Hefyd, ar y cyd, rŷm ni i gyd wedi cael y cyfle nawr i apwyntio swyddogion sy'n edrych yn benodol ar y defnydd gorau posibl o ymchwil a sut mae hwnnw yn ein galluogi ni i gynllunio mewn ffordd wybodus a bwydo i mewn i gynlluniau busnes. Rŷm ni hefyd yn y sefyllfa lle rŷm ni'n gallu cyflogi rhywun nawr ar y cyd i weithio ar draws y pedwar rhanbarth fel rhyw fath o swyddog prosiect, er mwyn—. Rŷm ni ond yn gwybod beth sy'n mynd ymlaen gystal â beth rŷm ni'n gwybod sy'n mynd ymlaen yn y rhanbarthau eraill. Felly, wrth gael rhywun sydd wedi cael ei gyflogi'n benodedig i wneud y darn yna o waith, fe fyddan nhw'n gallu gwneud yn siŵr nad ydym yn colli'r cyfleoedd yma i wybod beth sy'n mynd ymlaen yn y rhanbarthau eraill. Felly, rwy'n credu bod hwnnw'n mynd i fod yn adnodd pwysig i ni wrth i ni symud ymlaen.

Ms O'Connor: One of the specific pieces of work—. Debbie and Hannah have mentioned individual things that we are doing, and there are specific examples—for example, we've looked at work pressure and marking, and improving feedback for pupils was one of the things that was a priority within the ERW business plan. Also, collaboratively we've all had the opportunity to appoint officers who look specifically at the best use of research and how that can allow us to plan in an informed way and feed into business plans. We are also in a position where we can employ someone now jointly to work across the four regions as some kind of project officer in order to—. We only know what's going on as well as we know what's happening in the other regions. So, in having somebody who is specifically employed to do that piece of work, they will then be able to make sure that we don't miss these opportunities to know what's going on in other regions. So, I think that that's going to be a very important resource for us as we move on.

[87] Rŷm ni hefyd yn gallu edrych We can then also look at specific

wedyn ar bethau penodol—roedd Hannah yn sôn eto am y cymoedd diwydiannol. Rŷm ni, ar y cyd â GwE, wedi gwneud darn o waith ar ddysgu ac addysgu a beth yw'r problemau mewn ardaloedd gwledig. Felly, rŷm ni wedi edrych ar ddefnyddio ein hadnoddau yn y ffordd fwyaf cydweithredol posibl lle bo hynny wedi dod i'r fei.

things—Hannah mentioned the industrial valleys again. With GwE, we've done a joint piece of work on teaching and learning, and problems in rural areas. So, we have looked at using our resources in the most collaborative way possible where that has come to our attention.

[88] **Nick Ramsay:** Barry Rees.

[89] **Mr Rees:** Rhag ofn ein bod ni'n colli'r disgybl yng nghanol y drafodaeth hefyd, rwy'n credu lle mae'r rhanbarthau wedi gweithio'n arbennig o dda yw ar feysydd blaenoriaeth y Llywodraeth. Rŷm ni wedi llwyddo i godi deilliannau, yn enwedig o amgylch y ffin C/D mewn pynciau craidd ac ati, oherwydd dyna'r dangosyddion rŷm ni wedi cael ein mesur yn eu herbyn. Rwy'n credu, erbyn hyn—trwy'r OECD, mae PISA wedi dangos hyn, ac mae ein canlyniadau TGAU wedi dangos, nad oes digon o'n plant disglair ni yn cyrraedd y lefelau uchaf, neu mae canran rhy isel o ddisgyblion yn cyrraedd y lefelau uchaf. Felly, mae'n dyhead ni nawr, mae'r ffocws, yn gorfod ehangu i sicrhau bod plant ar draws yr ystod gallu yn perfformio i'w llawn potensial, yn enwedig os yw'n ddyhead gyda ni i ddatblygu'r economi—mae'n rhaid i ni ddatblygu arloeswyr ac mae'n rhaid i ni gael y disgyblion galluog yma drwodd. Allaf i ddim derbyn bod ein plant disglair ni yn llai disglair na phlant mewn

Mr Rees: I think, in case we're missing the pupil in the midst of all of this, where the regions have worked especially well is in the Government's priority areas. We have managed to improve outcomes, especially around the C/D threshold in core subjects, because those are the indicators that we have been measured against. I think by now—through the OECD, the PISA results have shown and our GCSE results have shown that not enough of our most able and talented pupils reach the highest levels, or too low a percentage of pupils reach the highest levels. So, our aspiration, our focus, should expand to ensure that children across the ability range perform to their full potential, especially if there's an aspiration for us to develop the economy—we have to develop innovators and we need these able and talented pupils to come through. I don't accept that our most talented pupils are less talented than children in other countries. So, that focus on pupils' attainment has

unrhyw wlad arall. Felly, mae'r ffocws yna ar gyflawniad disgyblion yn gorfod cael ei ehangu reit ar draws yr ystod gallu ac yn enwedig ar y top, oherwydd, yn ôl y data, nid ym ni'n perfformio lle dylem ni fod gyda'r rheini.

to be reflected across the ability range and especially at the top, because, according to the data, we don't perform as well as we should in that regard.

[90] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee, briefly, on this, before I bring in Neil McEvoy.

[91] **Lee Waters:** On the question of research, Betsan O'Connor, you mentioned that you have somebody who's employed to look at the research and to feed that in. I just wonder how that differs in detail from the approach that Hannah Woodhouse set out, which, as I heard it, seemed different and more collaborative, in that the researchers were part of the process of developing the work, rather than just simply feeding in. It felt a more collaborative arrangement than you set out, but I may be misunderstanding it. Can you just—?

14:45

[92] **Ms O'Connor:** Na, efallai taw fi sydd heb egluro yn ddigon eglur.

Ms O'Connor: No, maybe it's me who hasn't explained it clearly enough.

[93] **Lee Waters:** How does your approach differ to the south Wales central approach?

[94] **Ms O'Connor:** Nid wyf yn gwybod, a bod yn onest, sut rŷm ni'n wahanol. Rwy'n credu beth sy'n debyg yw taw beth ym ni'n moyn ei wneud yw cynnwys ysgolion yn darganfod y ffyrdd gorau o weithio. Felly, er enghraifft, pan fyddaf i'n sôn am bwysau gwaith neu farcio, ysgolion sy'n gwneud y gwaith yna gyda'r brifysgol, yn gwmws yn yr un ffordd ag y maen nhw'n ei wneud e yn *central south*. Beth sydd gyda fi yw un person i gydlynu hynny. Rwy'n credu bod hynny'n bwysig, oherwydd

Ms O'Connor: I don't know, to tell you the truth, how we're different. I think what's similar is that what we want to do is include the schools in terms of identifying the best ways of working. So, for example, when I talk about workloads and marking, it's the schools that do that work with the university, in exactly the same way that they do it in central south. What I have is one person to co-ordinate that. I think that that's important, because we had no capacity before now to operate and

nid oedd capasiti gyda ni cyn hyn i weithredu i gydlynu'r gwaith yma gyda'r prifysgolion. Mae e'n adnodd pwysig. Nid ydym ni wedi bod yn gwneud y defnydd gorau o'n prifysgolion i'n helpu ni i weithio gyda'n hysgolion. Ond mae'r ffaith ein bod ni'n gallu gosod adnodd i wneud y gwaith cydlynu yna, rwy'n credu yn ein helpu ni i helpu athrawon i ddarganfod yr arfer gorau, achos all ysgolion ddim ei wneud e ar eu pennau eu hunain. Rwy'n credu bod y cyfle i ni roi, efallai, olew ar y *cogs*—

to co-ordinate this work with the universities. It's an important resource. We haven't been making the best use of our universities to help us work with our schools. But the fact that we can now set aside a resource to do that co-ordination work, I think helps us to help teachers to find the best practice, because schools can't do it alone. I think that the opportunity for us to grease the wheels, perhaps—

[95] **Lee Waters:** That's a great principle. I'm deeply troubled, though, that you don't know the approach that they're taking, and that fleshes out the concerns I've been pressing.

[96] **Nick Ramsay:** Hannah Woodhouse, is that an approach on which you could comment?

[97] **Ms Woodhouse:** Yes. We have got a contract out at the moment that we're jointly funding with research bodies, which is precisely about picking out what works in each individual region. We have developed our approach, partly because, frankly, we had to do something different because the position in the region was really poor and we needed to do something quite dramatic. I think different regions are in different places, which is why we were able, and partly because directors were, at the time, relatively new in post—. We had all five authorities under Estyn monitoring. We were very poorly performing as a region. We had to do something quite dramatically different, and that was our context. We have got a contract out at the moment, which we're all funding together, to research bodies to draw on what works in EAS, in ERW, in GwE and in central south—from the teacher unions and from the leadership academy. You know, the wider sort of question is: who brings to the attention nationally what works across Wales?

[98] **Lee Waters:** Exactly.

[99] **Ms Woodhouse:** I think that there isn't much of a media anymore

because of cuts. There is a case for bringing to the attention what works in different places. In our region, it works for us, in other regions it will work differently, but that's why we've let that contract collectively, and that was something that we all supported.

[100] **Lee Waters:** Okay, thank you.

[101] **Nick Ramsay:** Rhianon Passmore very briefly, before I move on.

[102] **Rhianon Passmore:** I think you've already answered in terms of what systems are in place, so in regard to that contract that you talked about—you talked about a summit—my concern also is that we don't reinvent four different wheels all spinning, hopefully, in the same direction, and that we have got a systemic mechanism in place and proper fora so that everybody can, in a sense, peer to peer, school to school, learn what's happening across the piece that's good enough for our schools. So, outside that contract, it's just reassurance that I want, personally, in regard to that best practice not being kept in silos.

[103] **Ms Hartevelde:** Just in answer to that, it is absolutely not—if that's come across, that certainly isn't what's happening on the ground. The summit was actually a culmination of the national picture, and the four regions are absolutely integral to sharing the work that they do. It is new—the self-improving system approach to our schools is new—and, when I say 'new', three or four years old in Wales. So, there is work for us to do to build that culture on the ground in schools, but, certainly, at the level at which we work, we share that information. This joint post is due to be appointed this week, and that will further facilitate the sharing of that best practice so that we don't reinvent the wheel four times over.

[104] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you, Chair.

[105] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair. There's a very interesting survey report here, which is on pages 42 to 46, Chair. The thing is that every question you ask the teachers—actually, there were around about 50 per cent that disagree, strongly disagree or a combination. Hannah said earlier—and I agree with her—that there's little leadership in Wales. So, in light of that, how can you tackle it if teachers are not happy with every question that you ask? They are the front-line service provider to our children. So, that is the education system—don't you think there is some sort of anomaly there?

[106] **Nick Ramsay:** Hannah.

[107] **Ms Woodhouse:** Again, thank you for sharing the results of the survey, because I think it's been helpful to us. It is obviously one of many surveys that we were all doing at the time. It's also quite small in terms of the number of people who responded.

[108] **Mohammad Asghar:** Four hundred people—a 400-teacher average.

[109] **Ms Woodhouse:** In my region, 14 headteachers are part of that survey, which is 3 per cent of the headteachers in our region. I think, yes, we need to take it into account—yes, certainly for my part, but I think everyone would probably agree, we need to do more work with teachers as a body. We do tend to work with headteachers, because they are responsible for the professional learning of their staff, which is why we spend so much time with headteachers and governors.

[110] But I also think that if you ask teachers in our region, 'What has the consortium ever done for you?', then they may have partaken in a piece of work with another school that was funded by us, but they wouldn't have known it. They may have worked in a peer inquiry model, or they may have gone on a programme that was put on by another school that was funded by us, but we don't brand it as consortium work. All of our school-to-school work, you wouldn't necessarily know. So, just a word of caution: I think for my part and, I think, speaking on behalf of others, we can do more with teachers, and we're always in discussion with teacher unions about working more closely with them particularly.

[111] **Nick Ramsay:** Neil McEvoy.

[112] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes, the White Paper proposes that statutory guidance can help organisations to deliver more consistent approaches. So, the question, really, is: how effective has the Welsh Government's national model for regional working guidance been in helping you deliver your responsibilities and how might that be improved?

[113] **Nick Ramsay:** Who wants to answer? Hannah?

[114] **Neil McEvoy:** Guidance given by the Government—how effective has that been and how could it be improved?

[115] **Ms Woodhouse:** I was going to answer in response to the first question as to what would have been better, and, if we were to do this all again, what would we do differently—I think getting the national model really clear at the beginning, before September 2012, in terms of responsibilities, budget, governance, success measures and capacity expectations. I think, yes, we had a model in 2013, we had an updated model in 2014, and here we are at the beginning of 2017 looking at the impact of it. I think getting real clarity about the model that we're delivering before we started delivering it would, I think, have been helpful. I think, for me, it is now clear. I think if you are going to talk about other functions then we obviously need to look at it again, and the comments that others have made apply, but I think it is now clear for the functions that we are performing now.

[116] **Neil McEvoy:** Okay. Anybody else?

[117] **Ms Hartevelde:** I would mirror what Hannah has said, but I really stress the fact that if the White Paper looks to add additional services at any level—into the regional footprint, that is, or a new footprint—the model needs to catch up so that it's clear at the outset. The model as it currently sits does exactly what it says on the tin—certainly within our region—and it's very helpful to help us to determine roles and responsibilities and where they sit. For me, that's key because the school workforce—all of our stakeholders—need to have a very clear understanding of who does what, at its simplest terms, within the system.

[118] **Mr A. Thomas:** [*Anghlyw.*]—yn fwy cymhleth os oes yna unrhyw esblygu yn mynd i fod yn y dyfodol. Mae'n mynd yn fwy cymhleth oherwydd mae nifer o'r gwasanaethau sydd yn yr awdurdodau lleol ar hyn o bryd—mae yna lawer iawn o bartneriaethau yn gweithio o'u cwmpas nhw. Felly, mae'r darn cychwynol o ran gwella ysgolion yn eithaf clir o ran eu rôl a'u pwrpas. Yn ôl i'r cam cychwynol, rydw i'n ailadrodd ychydig bach o beth sydd wedi cael ei ddweud eisoes, ond ein bod yn hollol glir

Mr A. Thomas: [*Inaudible.*] This will make things more complicated if there's any evolution in the future. It will be more complicated, because a number of the services within local authorities currently—there are a lot of partnerships working around them. So, that initial work in terms of improving schools is quite clear in terms of their role and purpose. But, back to the initial steps—I'm repeating much of what has already been said—we need to be clear about what exactly the service is and who is responsible for it, and defining the

beth yn union ydy'r gwasanaeth, pwy sydd i fod yn gyfrifol amdano fo, a lle mae yna rôl i bartneriaeth, bod diffinio rôl y partneriaid hynny yn gorfod bod yn hollol eglur a'n bod yn glir beth yw'r deilliannau yr ydym yn cynllunio tuag atyn nhw reit o'r dechrau—symud unrhyw wasanaethau pellach drosodd i beth bynnag fydd yr endid yn edrych yn debyg iddo fe.

role of that partnership needs to be completely clear so that we are clear what the outcomes are that we are planning towards them right from the very beginning—moving any further services over to whatever the entity will look like.

[119] **Neil McEvoy:** Just to follow up, really, looking at the evidence in the report, the NASUWT doesn't agree that the regional consortia model presents a good example of collaborative working. There is a lack of understanding of the role, and, given what has been said, I think the survey bears out what you said, really, because only 23 per cent of those surveyed agreed that the model was understood and 54 per cent disagreed that regional consortia provide effective continuing professional development. If you look at the auditor general's report on page 68,

[120] 'there is not yet a national strategic approach to attracting talent and developing the leadership for school improvement.'

[121] Page 70:

[122] 'the quality of progress in specific areas is variable'.

[123] Page 71: there are

[124] 'weaknesses in the identification and use of appropriate outcome measures and targets.'

[125] Now, I'm speaking as a former teacher, really, because I used to do year seven assemblies and say, you know, 'Before you go anywhere, decide where your destination is and have your aim before you start', and I'm just astonished, really, to listen to this evidence that when the Minister kicked off these consortia in 2012, that things weren't clear. It's just absolutely astonishing.

[126] **Nick Ramsay:** What's your question there, Neil?

[127] **Neil McEvoy:** Would you share my astonishment that the models were not clear in 2012? Because I find it absolutely dumbfounding, really, that things weren't clear. If you're going to start the consortia and go on a journey, you need to know where your destination is.

[128] **Nick Ramsay:** I don't think you're going to get agreement there, Neil, somehow. Does anyone wish to comment on the—?

[129] **Neil McEvoy:** It's been said, though. I'm flummoxed to understand that if things weren't clear at the outset, then where was everybody going?

[130] **Nick Ramsay:** Going back to my initial question about if you were starting today and lessons that have been learned, do you think that the journey has been clear enough, or is there scope for improvement? That, I think, is the question. Nick Batchelar.

[131] **Mr Batchelar:** Could I say something that bears on your question even if it doesn't directly seek to answer it? I think it's important, moving forward, that we don't attach the term 'school improvement' to consortia and think that consortia are the only elements of the quite complex system that delivers school improvement. Ultimately, really great schools deliver school improvement and great teaching in classrooms that are in schools that are really well led deliver school improvement.

[132] So, I think in terms of moving forward, I'd say two things: one is a sort of cautionary note from touching on the OECD comments, and one, perhaps, bears on the experience of implementing the first version of the national model. The cautionary note that it's worth holding on to from the OECD is their point about the risks of having continual change in education policy and the importance of a period of consolidation, clarity of focus, focusing on the right things and building the capacity to deliver the aspirations that have been, now increasingly, clearly set out, in my view.

[133] So, there is some risk in changing the architecture, if you like, at this point in time, unless there's an evidence-based argument for saying that changing the architecture will actually help us deliver that programme of improvement. In terms of what we might learn and looking forward at a further articulation of a sort of national model, it's important to bear in mind that something that calls itself a national model needs to be clear about the roles at different levels of the structure and much of the initial statement

about the national model focused on the role of consortia.

[134] It's really important also to talk about the role of schools and the role of the national Government in terms of the national programme for improvement. I think getting the—. If you like, if you think of those three layers of a sandwich, the middle tier in which I've put consortia and local authorities—it's important to have the role distinction right. It's important that there is clarity about what sits at the national level and it's really important about what sits in the hands of schools, school leaders and practitioners in schools. I think that's a useful thing to take forward in a positive sense about shaping the future more strongly.

[135] **Neil McEvoy:** What's the annual cost of the consortia in Wales?

[136] **Nick Ramsay:** Hannah.

[137] **Ms Woodhouse:** The auditor general's report sets out that it was less than 1 per cent of the total spend on education across Wales if you take into account school budgets.

[138] **Neil McEvoy:** Okay, so what was the sum then? What is that?

[139] **Ms Woodhouse:** I can't tell you the sum, but I think NASUWT have helpfully set out—

[140] **Nick Ramsay:** We'll have a figure for you shortly.

[141] **Neil Hamilton:** It's £18.5 million.

[142] **Neil McEvoy:** Okay.

[143] **Ms Woodhouse:** NASUWT have helpfully set out in their evidence that the original budgets for the four consortia—what did you say? A total of £18.5 million?

[144] **Nick Ramsay:** £18.5 million.

[145] **Mr A. Thomas:** £18.5 million.

[146] 15:00

[147] **Neil McEvoy:** I could go on to my other question, or we could come back to that at the end.

[148] **Nick Ramsay:** We'll come back to that, yes. Lee, did you have some more questions?

[149] **Lee Waters:** On school improvement, I take your point about the complex mosaic of the different actors at play. I note that, formally, school improvement is the responsibility of the LEA, not the consortia, and that LEA spending in the last five years on school improvement has gone down by 49 per cent from £105 million to £52.5 million, according to the auditor general's report. So, there is obviously a significant strain on the resources available for school improvement. Does that division of responsibilities make a difference? Is it a barrier? Is it simply a matter of theory? Could you just give us some insight into the picture of, operationally, how the school improvement process works, and whether or not the boundaries are irrelevant or an obstacle?

[150] **Mr Batchelar:** I think at the present time, the delineation between the role of the consortia and the role of local authorities in the school is increasingly clear. Consortia are there to deliver high-quality professional challenge and support to school leaders and to act as the eyes and ears for the accountable body, namely the local authorities and the directors, on the quality and standards in the school system. They're also there to deliver professional training and support, and increasingly that's done, as both Debbie and Hannah have explained, and colleagues in other consortia, through commissioning schools to work in partnership with other schools on a range of bases—either a traded basis or a fully funded basis.

[151] I think, in relation to the White Paper, it's important to recognise that many of the other services that bear on education are actually funded—and it varies from local authority to local authority—from the delegated schools budget. So, many of the services that schools rely on in order to function well as schools, like HR advice and guidance, legal advice, grass cutting, building maintenance, catering services and so on—they're not strictly speaking educational functions, but that's where lots of money is tied up. A sizeable amount of that money—it depends on the level of delegation in a local authority—is in school budgets. So, key players in the determination of where those services should be configured in the future have to be schools themselves in their role as customers. So, that's an important piece of the debate that I think's not really configured in at the moment. Part of a policy

shift that pushes more responsibility into the hands of school leaders—and I think there is a developing consensus that that is the right way to proceed, as long as you've got a strong accountability framework around it—needs to place the consumer choice power in the hands of school leaders and their governors. It doesn't necessarily reside with local authorities or the consortia as the sole provider. So, I think that opens up a range of issues, in relation to the determination of the future shape of services that schools need in order to be good schools, that aren't really scoped into the current debate.

[152] **Lee Waters:** That's a very interesting point. So, what are the implications of that, do you think?

[153] **Mr Batchelar:** Well, I think the implications of that are that we don't—it doesn't follow that service provision needs to be attached to the current governance arrangements. It may be that local authorities collaborate between themselves in a way that sits outside the current governance arrangements. I think a key question is whether attaching the traded provision of more services to consortia would help or hinder their focus on their key roles—the key roles being challenge and advice, and the development of the professional practice of people in schools.

[154] **Lee Waters:** Okay. That will require some reflection from us, I think. That's an interesting point. The snapshot of the picture that we're getting from the papers that we've had is that this is a maturing system, but there's still a huge degree of variability. It's bedding in. There's some anxiety and uncertainty amongst the different partners in the sector about being clear what the roles are, and also about what the future is, and the stability of the future. If I understand it, your point is that there's a degree of further instability that hasn't been factored into the planning of the sector that may well impact on the actually delivered quality of the school improvement services to schools.

[155] **Mr Batchelar:** I'm picking up the cautionary note from the OECD about the importance of consolidating the policy approach that's been outlined. Therefore, I think there are risks in the notion of developing a new model that substantially reconfigures where service provision and accountabilities are in the system. And that should—. If there are to be such deep structural changes, then that should be taken with a pretty high degree of certainty that actually it will contribute to and further accelerate the improvement path that we've started on. When you have large-scale structural change, you always have the classic implementation dip and we should be cognisant of that as a

risk.

[156] **Lee Waters:** Thank you.

[157] **Nick Ramsay:** Are you done? Mohammad Asghar, did you have any more questions?

[158] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much indeed, Chair. What are the key barriers to securing further school improvement for the longer term and how might these be overcome in light of the auditor general's memorandum, which highlights the ongoing challenges of protecting talent and developing the leadership for school improvement in Wales?

[159] **Ms O'Connor:** One of the key things that we've done—. We are very conscious that recruitment and retention is a challenge across all our schools: we're struggling to recruit headteachers and teachers. One of the things that we have done together is to pool our resources to launch the Discover Teaching campaign, and that's been something that we've worked on because we've identified that need and we saw there was a gap in terms of managing that. We've worked with our colleagues in initial teacher training in the HEIs as well, and with Careers Wales, to look at how we can get a coherent national campaign. We've also looked as individual regions at how we grow our own within our staffing structures. We've all got programmes that look at growing our own leaders within that system and within the new academy we will all be working together in terms of how do we make sure that those aspiring headteachers— aspiring leaders within the system—get an equitable, common entitlement to support and training. Also, ADEW have run—I think it was last year—a programme looking at future directors for Wales. So, I think we have got certain strategies that we've already put in place for that. Obviously, it will take time to bed through, but, again, we're in a relatively new position. But I think some of the strategies we've taken make sense and hopefully will yield benefits to us as we move forward.

[160] **Mohammad Asghar:** How much of a problem is this and how are you ensuring that your own recruitment does not have a negative impact on schools?

[161] **Ms O'Connor:** I can speak on behalf of my own region. One of the strategies we use—. We want recent, relevant and competent teachers and the best teachers supporting other teachers. One of the ways that we do it is that we work towards a deliberately transient workforce, so that we're

growing our own within the system. We try to avoid the more traditional way of working where you'd have advisers sitting behind desks maybe in County Hall et cetera. So, we're growing our own in the system and then after a year, or a part-time secondment, people will go back into school. Some of the examples that I know we've got in our region—but, again, other regions have got very similar models—are where those people would come out as heads of department go back as assistant heads, come out as deputies and go back as headteachers. So, we're allowing this as a region. Because of the economies of scale and the size of the regions we're able to give people experiences where they grow their experience and capacity and they're able to go back, similar to a London escalator-type effect.

[162] **Nick Ramsay:** I like the analogy. Arwyn Thomas.

[163] **Mr A. Thomas:** May I suggest as well that we need to invest in this in the long term? Because we've got to really—. Basically, we're talking about a significant change in the culture of the teaching profession and the leadership profession in Wales where, for nearly 30 years, we've supported schools to be on their own to work independently, and now all of a sudden we're having this significant shift in collaboration and a move towards collaboration. So, with initial teacher training, we really need to start identifying talent at that very early stage. Because we've really got to introduce, as part of the skills that we require, the skills of collaboration and of working together and that we share issues rather than keep issues to ourselves. There's a significant shift in culture in how we see the profession actually working and being responsible. If you're really pushing the boundaries of a self-improving system, then we need to be not only responsible for 'my' school but for 'our' schools, and that's a significant shift from where we are at this point in time. So, that's going to take—. Betsan used the escalator approach—it's going to take some time for some people to walk along that route. An early investment in people—. We've got to really look at our professional requirements and do we actually contract people into individual schools or groups of schools. There is a range of issues that we need to tease out here if you really want to invest in leadership talent, leadership sharing and developing people over a period of time.

[164] **Nick Ramsay:** Neil Hamilton.

[165] **Neil Hamilton:** I'd like to ask about professional development. Our teachers' professional learning and education survey, which Oscar has already referred to, asked respondents the following question:

[166] 'My regional education consortia provides effective continuing professional development to teachers and teaching assistants at all levels'.

[167] Fifty-four per cent actually disagreed with that. Only 16 per cent actually agreed with it. The second question that was asked is:

[168] 'The current continuing professional development programme provides school staff with the skills and knowledge they need effectively to do their jobs'.

[169] Sixty-one per cent disagreed with that and 17.5 per cent agreed with it. So, you don't seem to be getting your message through to teachers or else there's something wrong. Can you tell me what you think it is?

[170] **Ms Hartevelde:** I think Hannah referred to this in one of her previous responses. Much of our professional development offer is delivered by schools for schools and we have a role to quality assure that provision and to organise and orchestrate that provision across the region. I don't want to skew the results in any way, but many teachers would not align the support they get from a school that's providing professional development with that work of the consortium or, indeed, the local authority. Without speaking to teachers it's hard to understand where those responses have come from. But, certainly, when we did our own survey within our own region, and I know there are similar responses in other regions, the response was much higher, albeit from leaders. So, there are some lessons in here, certainly, for us. But I think it also needs to be unpicked and looked at with a slight air of caution. Not to say that it's wrong in any way, but just to have a different slant on it because the professional learning offer, certainly across our region and I know across other regions, is far greater than it's ever been for teachers. Whether they align that to the consortia, there's work we need to do there if that is the case.

[171] **Neil Hamilton:** Well, these are your clients in a sense, in this respect at any rate, and if they don't know what you're doing for them, then that's a failure of communication on your part, isn't it?

[172] **Ms Hartevelde:** I think there's definitely some learning in there for us and much of the work that we do is centred around leadership, so, around headteachers, governors and chairs of governors and so on and so forth. There are messages in there, obviously, that we all need to take heed of, but

also possibly we need to be more explicit in the professional learning offer that we put out, that it is actually badged up, if that's important. What's important from my perspective is that teachers get what they need. So, I think there are lessons for all of us, I suppose, as part of that.

[173] **Neil Hamilton:** But in terms of public policy development, if we're getting these kinds of responses, which are misleading, then there is a need for proper communication of the system that you're employing to deliver the services that part of your £18.5 million a year is spent on. Otherwise, we may draw the wrong conclusions from the surveys.

[174] **Nick Ramsay:** Just to be clear, you're surprised by the responses that Neil Hamilton has referred to.

[175] **Ms Hartevelde:** Yes, we are.

[176] **Nick Ramsay:** That's not what you're hearing.

[177] **Ms Woodhouse:** No.

[178] **Ms Hartevelde:** No.

[179] **Ms Woodhouse:** And just to follow that up, and as I said earlier on, yes, we do need to listen and, yes, we've got further to go, but I undertook a survey of a 20 per cent sample of teachers and school leaders that weren't from particularly affluent schools or schools we like or schools we work with; it was properly sampled. We spent hours on sampling methodology and all of that; I don't know about the sampling methodology of the survey here. But it did say, based on your experience over the last year—this is teachers—

[180] 'I have a better understanding of what an effective professional looks like'.

[181] Eighty per cent of primary and 60 per cent of secondary teachers agreed or strongly agreed.

[182] On 'I spend more time encouraging and supporting others, working with other teachers', and, 'I am encouraged to lead on aspects of professional development and learning', all of these were 70 per cent or 80 per cent in primary, and 50 per cent or 60 per cent in secondary. That's an important point actually: the difference we definitely found in secondary. Our

data are showing a different picture.

15:15

[183] That's not to say we haven't got further to go. I suppose I personally—and this is a personal point—don't particularly mind whether teachers know it's the consortium providing their professional learning. I think their headteacher needs to make sure that they have access to professional learning, wherever it comes from, and that that happens. I don't particularly mind that it's branded by the consortium at all.

[184] **Neil Hamilton:** No, but we do because our job is to evaluate you as well as them, and therefore we need to have proper information we can rely on. The methodology that we've employed is that 54 per cent of the respondents were classroom teachers, 18 per cent senior managers, 17 per cent school governors, 11 per cent teaching assistants and 6 per cent other educational professionals, it's rather a different kind of—. We haven't actually split up the teachers between primary and secondary, so I don't know to what extent these are similar, or whether the differences matter. But, I think we understand, anyway, that there is an argument to be had here about how we get better quality information for us to rely on.

[185] **Lee Waters:** Can I make—

[186] **Nick Ramsay:** Hang on a minute, Lee. Arwyn, did you just want to comment on that? And then I'll bring Lee in.

[187] **Mr A. Thomas:** Just developing that point, the Audit Commission and the Wales Audit Office ran a biannual survey on education services across England and Wales, and you were able to benchmark—. There were quite service detailed questions in that survey, and the individual local authority was invited, then, to pose a few of their own questions if they had developed a particular local flavour of strategy. I think that was dispensed with around four years ago, but I thought that was a really useful benchmark opportunity for exactly the question you're asking. We were able to ask these from an individual perspective, how we were performing compared to a similar service that was being offered elsewhere. So, it was a really useful benchmarking tool.

[188] At this point in time, you've got Estyn who are also surveying schools with a similar set of questions as well, so I think it would be useful to have a

common survey that we're all signed up to and agree on what's involved. This is not taking away from the findings here, or what Estyn find out, but I think for public information that could be really useful, and schools would then be aware that this is a survey that we all support them actually filling, and hopefully we'd get a strong response across the board.

[189] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee Waters.

[190] **Lee Waters:** Yes, I just wanted to offer a different interpretation of the figures to that which Neil Hamilton has offered. I'm not surprised by it. This is consistent with the conversations I've had with primary heads, particularly, in my area. There's this figure here:

[191] 'I have a good understanding of the role of regional education consortia'.

[192] Amongst headteachers, 21.4 per cent either strongly disagree or disagree. Well, there really is no excuse, is there, for a headteacher not to have a good understanding of the role of the regional education consortia? I'm sure there's more you can do around transparency and information, but one in five headteachers not feeling they have a good—. That reflects on them as much as it reflects on you, surely. And, does this indicate some level of resistance or indifference that you're having in your work in getting engagement from headteachers, in the primary sector, I'd imagine, especially?

[193] **Ms Hartevelde:** I think it comes back to Arwyn's point. We've all done surveys as have Estyn, when we were inspected last year, with that question—I think that's the first question on all of the ones that we do. Certainly, my latest survey was September of last year—I do them annually to help inform self-evaluation activity—and the response of headteachers in my region to that exact questions was around about 75 to 80 per cent that they agree or strongly agree, from the survey that I did—

[194] **Lee Waters:** So, that's consistent then.

[195] **Ms Hartevelde:** So, the survey that you're quoting—. I don't sense resistance—

[196] **Lee Waters:** It's the same result, isn't it? If 20 per cent say they don't feel have good knowledge, and you're saying 80 per cent do, that's the

same.

[197] **Ms Harteveld:** Just within my region.

[198] **Lee Waters:** Yes, sure. So, there is a consistent picture of a one in five—a rump—who are not engaging in some way. Shouldn't that alarm us?

[199] **Ms Harteveld:** Well, it depends on the number of heads in each region that replied to the survey. I'm not—. The breakdown—.

[200] **Ms O'Connor:** [*Inaudible*—our survey is saying exactly the same. We've got one out now, which is live, and it's—

[201] **Lee Waters:** Yes. It's consistent with your survey and it's consistent with this survey and it's consistent with my own anecdotal experience. We can argue with the numbers, but there's a picture here emerging of a significant number of professional leaders in primary schools in particular, who, for whatever reason, aren't really buying into this system. That is my point.

[202] **Ms Woodhouse:** I agree. I think it is the responsibility of headteachers to keep their heads up. I know, if you're running a small school, you're maybe teaching and that, but it is the responsibility of headteachers to keep their heads up and understand the system that they're in. The system has been in place now for some time, albeit differently, slightly, in different regions, and we are dealing with heads who aren't necessarily—

[203] **Nick Ramsay:** Is it wholly their responsibility, as headteachers? I mean, it's not enough, is it, to simply say, 'A fifth aren't engaging, therefore, we're not going to worry about it'? I mean, there must surely be something that can be done to try and bring these people back into the fold.

[204] **Ms Harteveld:** Absolutely. It is part of our role to engage school leaders, and many of us have got different strategies and ways that we do that. Certainly, in our region, we're engaging schools more as clusters, to enable all schools in a cluster to engage. Also, we have to make sure that the message of the self-improving system is shared equally with our governors in our schools, so that governors—they are part of school leadership; a very important part—are equally aware. So, I think we all—directors, ourselves, governors—have a role to play in ensuring that we reach as many school leaders as we possibly can as part of that.

[205] **Mr A. Thomas:** It would be really useful to know who these people actually are, and it's a question then of, 'Are they engaging or not? Are we communicating effectively or not? Are they unclear about where the consortium begins and ends and where their own local authority begins and ends?' So, I think it's those three strands to getting under the skin of the representation there, really.

[206] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay. We're into the last 10 minutes. I know that Rhianon has a very brief question—

[207] **Rhianon Passmore:** It is very brief.

[208] **Nick Ramsay:** And I'll give Barry Rees a chance to respond then, and I'll bring in Neil McEvoy.

[209] **Rhianon Passmore:** It's more of trying to collate different views very quickly, I suppose. With regard to the very difficult and complex work that is ongoing with local authorities and consortia, and the overall responsibility of headteachers in terms of improvement, would it be fair to say that there is always going to be an element, in terms of the vast differences of school leadership across Wales, which in a sense may struggle to have that engagement because it's difficult on a very practical level, with consortia who are actively coming, sometimes, into the school and saying, quite frankly, 'We would like to you to improve in this area'? So, is that a fair comment to make? I don't know if you can—

[210] **Mr Rees:** Yes. I think that was my very input to your question. I was going to say that, sometimes, the relationship with schools, particularly schools on the third-step judgment in categorisation where we look at their capacity to improve, which involves the quality of leadership and it involves their engagement with their improvement journey—. Sometimes in those schools that have a C or D judgment, where we've judged that they've got a way to go in that judgment, sometimes that relationship where we are trying to intervene and trying to push open that door and keep that door open and have constructive relations with those schools, I would suggest that maybe some of those negative responses may well come from those teachers who are being challenged and their performance is being challenged. However, that doesn't mean that we should shy away from that challenge.

[211] **Rhianon Passmore:** Absolutely not.

[212] **Nick Ramsay:** Neil McEvoy.

[213] **Neil McEvoy:** Yes. I express concern, really, because I saw figures for 2014–15 that £41 million was spent on supply teachers, and there is a preferred partner. I wondered what your view was on that in terms of, I'd say, the extra expense and the money that is not saved. Because, on paper, I think it's easy to claim savings, but in reality, I think there's a lot of money slipping out of the system and I just wondered what your view was on that.

[214] **Ms Hartevelde:** We engaged, as regions, with the supply taskforce committee. We have also spent some time talking to Welsh Government officials about the outcomes of that report. Only last week, Betsan and I met, on behalf of the people who are sat here in front of you, with Welsh Government officials to talk about how we, as regions, with our local authorities, could look at some of the figures and some of the information that that taskforce actually reported on, and there are some quite clear recommendations in there for local authorities, and for regions, to look at how we can work with the supply force that we have across schools. Not specifically around the finance; we haven't looked at that yet. What we're looking at is the quality.

[215] **Neil McEvoy:** Is it still New Directions? I understand it's on until 2018.

[216] **Ms Hartevelde:** I understand that the preferred supplier is New Directions. It wouldn't be something I've got a huge amount of knowledge about.

[217] **Neil McEvoy:** The point is they'll pay a teacher roughly £80, £85 a day, and they will bill the school £140 or £145. Those are the 2012 figures. There are other agencies that do the supply a lot cheaper. So, you're looking at roughly, what's that, 40—. So, 42 per cent of the supply budget on one day for one member of staff is going to a company based in London instead of to staff in Wales. That causes some huge concern. I think it's very poor pay for professionals, and it's making a company fairly wealthy. And I think this really needs to be looked at. Is there a rule as well for hospitality that New Directions could or could not offer to—? Headteachers and others have to declare any golf days they've been to, or any sporting tickets they've been given by New Directions, if they are—

[218] **Nick Ramsay:** I think we are getting a little bit off the beaten track

with—

[219] **Ms Hartevelde:** I'm not aware of that, sorry.

[220] **Neil McEvoy:** But I want to come back to the point of finance, because there's huge slippage, so you're talking, every single year, millions of pounds going out of the system that could be kept in the system. If you look at the software available, then is there a need for teaching agencies now?

[221] **Nick Ramsay:** That's a wider issue, really, than for the consortia. I mean, that's—

[222] **Neil McEvoy:** It's important to air, though, because you've got the preferred partner, which is costing the public sector a lot of money, in fact. There may be savings on paper, but the reality is that there's lots of money going out of the system that should be kept in.

[223] **Nick Ramsay:** I think that is the situation we find ourselves in. Did you want to come back at that point, Neil Hamilton?

[224] **Neil Hamilton:** I wanted to follow up my questions earlier on with another one, which arises from the verbal responses that we got from people in our survey, and that's relating to the cost and availability of professional development services. This is typical—it says that a lot of courses and resources come at too high a cost for large numbers of staff to benefit. Can you give us your view on that?

[225] **Ms Woodhouse:** I think, and others will be looking at this as well, £133 million is spent in the education improvement grant nationally. In my region, that's £30—something million. In my region, 94 per cent of that goes to schools. So, primary schools will tell you that they need to fund staffing, particularly in the foundation phase, with a lot of the funding, which is for professional development and therefore it is very restricted. It's also restricted across secondary schools. But there is—. I think—. My point, which I make to schools, is that it is for the school to look at their budget, to look at their priorities in terms of resourcing, to look at their staffing structure, and to look at the priority they place on professional learning as part of their use of resources. Nobody is saying it's a pleasurable place. It's definitely tight, and it's getting tighter. We have seen cuts to that budget in the last couple of years as well. But I do think it is for the school to look at their own prioritisation.

[226] In our region, we are looking at funding professional—. Well, professional learning will be free to schools from next year, because we did identify this as a barrier, but I know also, for example, that the leadership academy are looking, at the moment, at the accessibility and cost of professional learning for leaders and future leaders from across all the consortia, with exactly that point in mind.

[227] **Neil Hamilton:** So, is that true of other consortia as well?

[228] **Ms Woodhouse:** They're looking at the case across all four consortia, to make sure that we have a quality available offer in place wherever you are in the region.

[229] **Neil Hamilton:** Because your principal task is to improve the quality of education, and, clearly, continuing professional development is an important part of that.

[230] **Nick Ramsay:** If I could just augment that point, the NASUWT has said that there's ongoing confusion about the responsibility for consortia and human resources. Would that be a criticism that you would recognise?

[231] **Ms Hartevelde:** No.

[232] **Mr Batchelar:** No.

[233] **Ms O'Connor:** There may be a lack of clarity on behalf of the NASUWT on this matter, in terms of employment—

15:30

[234] **Nick Ramsay:** That would be a different issue. [*Laughter.*]

[235] **Ms O'Connor:** Yes. And I think we're quite clear that we are not employers, and that the support we provide, in terms of professional learning, et cetera, we do provide. But we're not employers of teachers.

[236] **Nick Ramsay:** So they shouldn't be looking at the consortia for that, anyway—that should be coming from elsewhere.

[237] **Ms O'Connor:** Yes.

[238] **Nick Ramsay:** Right, we're almost out of time, so very quickly from Rhianon, then Lee.

[239] **Rhianon Passmore:** Briefly then, in regard to the amalgamation formerly of the previous grants into EIG, is there argument for non-delegation around professional development, and should that be held in-house within consortia, purely?

[240] **Ms Woodhouse:** Is there argument around—? Sorry.

[241] **Rhianon Passmore:** Ring fencing around professional development, in terms of the EIG grant—so, instead of having that complete autonomy within the school system. Is there any view on that from the consortia, or is that difficult to answer?

[242] **Ms Harteveld:** I think headteachers should be allowed to make their own decisions about what their staffing development needs are within each school. That's a personal opinion.

[243] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay.

[244] **Nick Ramsay:** And Lee Waters, finally.

[245] **Lee Waters:** Two quick questions about Estyn, if I could. One is that Estyn are not seeking to inspect LEAs in the next round of inspections, but will look at the consortia instead. So, I just wondered—

[246] **Ms O'Connor:** No, that's not what—

[247] **Lee Waters:** Well, that's what the chief inspector of schools told us before Christmas: for the next round, they're not looking at LEAs, they'll be looking at consortia.

[248] **Mr A. Thomas:** They're looking at local authorities, as we understand, from the autumn of this year, and looking to roll out at individual local authority, and they're consulting on a local authority framework at this point in time.

[249] **Lee Waters:** Okay. Well, that's an interesting development, because that's not my understanding of the evidence of the chief inspector before

Christmas, but we'll clarify that. Secondly, Estyn haven't drawn any judgments about the impact of the consortia on standards, because of difficulty of correlating the data. I just wondered if you have a view on that, and whether that's likely to change.

[250] **Mr A. Thomas:** I think the decision at that point in time was that the—. Nick has made the point several times that to solely attribute standards to the consortia in its infancy, as the consortia was, you were looking at data that were longitudinal, and it was pre-consortia days. Now, let's be honest about it, there will come a time where that demarcation will be far clearer, as the consortia mature, and we fully expect to be part of the consultation and discussion when that actually is—. Because it's one of our key questions when Estyn will be revisiting us all in the autumn—are standards in, or are standards out, as part of the ongoing discussions.

[251] **Lee Waters:** Right. Okay. Well, we shall ask Estyn.

[252] **Mr Batchelar:** Probably get a more accurate answer. [*Laughter.*]

[253] **Nick Ramsay:** That's a very good link, actually, to our next evidence session—I believe Estyn are up in the gallery, and will be in shortly. So, can I thank our witnesses? I will not thank you by name, because we'll be here for another five minutes. But thanks for being with us today. Before we finalise today's proceedings, the transcript, we'll send you a copy of it, just so that you can check it for accuracy. But that's been really helpful. I know it was a bit of a marathon session, but you've been really helpful. So, thanks for being with us today. We will now take a short break—six and a half minutes—before we bring in our next witnesses, who are from Estyn.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 15:33 a 15:43.
The meeting adjourned between 15:33 and 15:43.*

Consortia Addysg Rhanbarthol: Sesiwn Dystiolaeth 2 Regional Education Consortia: Evidence Session 2

[254] **Nick Ramsay:** Can I welcome Members back to this afternoon's meeting of the Public Accounts Committee? Item 4 on our agenda is the regional education consortia, evidence session 2. With that, can I welcome our witnesses—a slightly more manageable number than in the last session? Would you like to give your names and organisations for our Record of Proceedings?

[255] **Mr Brown:** Simon Brown, strategic director in Estyn.

[256] **Mr Phillips:** Clive Phillips, assistant director of Estyn.

[257] **Mr Campion:** Mark Campion, Her Majesty's inspector, Estyn.

[258] **Nick Ramsay:** Great, thank you. We've got a number of questions for you. If I can kick off with the general questions to start: what are your views on the best fit for the regional delivery of education improvement services? Who wants to take that? Mark.

[259] **Mr Campion:** Thank you for this one. I know you explored this at some length with your previous witnesses. The national model has obviously developed over time. The existence of a clear national model is helpful.

15:45

[260] It provides a good framework for them to work from, and we've recognised the improvement in the consortia as they've evolved, and the clarity about what they're there for, what they do and the services that they provide. They have, obviously, evolved over time. We've seen greater collaboration of late between the consortia and I think you heard a fair bit of that, actually, in the previous session, where they are increasingly working together rather than competitively. So, there are a number of different initiatives and I won't go through them. They refer to where they're working more coherently, more as a whole body, where it's appropriate to do so within that national agenda, as to what regional school improvement services are there to provide. So, it's that balance between a consistent approach to a national model whilst having the scope that they need to take account of local context, the size of the regions, languages, the context of different schools in urban areas and the Valleys, and so forth.

[261] **Nick Ramsay:** Excellent, thank you. In terms of consistency, is there room for regional variation? Is consistency desirable?

[262] **Mr Campion:** If I can just—further to the answer I just gave you, I think in the remit report that we wrote a couple of years ago, prior to inspection, we picked up on issues around inconsistencies across the consortia and within the consortia—it was a key theme. The situation has improved in terms of the consistency both in a consortium and across the consortia in

terms of the quality of the service that they provide. So, the quality of challenge has improved. I think our latest position is that we think that the consortia know most of their schools well, for example. When we wrote our first report, that was not the case. So, there is greater consistency in what they do, but we would recognise that they need a degree of flexibility to address the specific issues that face their region; the size of GwE and ERW present considerable challenges operationally for how staff work. So, you need to have different approaches. However, the concept of what you're actually trying to do, your model of school improvement involving headteachers in the system in particular and ensuring that schools are supporting each other in the system—. In that process, there is greater consistency—that that is the philosophy, if you like, the way that they want to work. How you actually implement that operationally is going to be different because of the size, because of the language needs of a region, the sizes of schools in the region and so on.

[263] **Nick Ramsay:** And turning to specific examples, in its White Paper the Welsh Government has identified the need to sort out the position of Bridgend. What are your thoughts on that issue from an educational perspective?

[264] **Mr Brown:** We've got no fixed view on that, but we do have some considerations we'd like to share. In education, Bridgend is part of the Central South Consortium, which if the economic footprint for the Cardiff region is a preferred model, it maps on to that. So, there are benefits that means that the governance arrangements aren't too dissimilar and there's also minimal disruption because one of the issues that you picked up from the consortia when they were talking before was about churn and disruption to the system. So, the Central South Consortia mapping on to Cardiff central is minimal disruption. But, on the other hand, the other side of the coin might be, if additional services go to the consortia, as the White Paper suggests, such as additional learning needs support, then the relationship between social care and health might come into play and you've got Bridgend fitting, perhaps, better on the Swansea bay city region. This is one of the issues, I think, with Bridgend. It's six of one, half a dozen of the other.

[265] **Nick Ramsay:** You started off with a 'Yes, Minister'—type response and you ended up with a good analogy. Rhianon Passmore, did you want to come in?

[266] **Rhianon Passmore:** I think you've clearly outlined some of the

conundrum within that. So, in terms of the White Paper and its overview around regional governance and its emphasis around that, what would be the risk to current consortia arrangements around any changes around regional footprint, perhaps more on a general theme rather than specific to Central South? Do you see any benefits? I mean, I think you've clearly outlined an issue there, potentially, but—.

[267] **Mr Brown:** There're a few points. I mean, one is that regional working is very complex and it takes time to set up and to start to embed. As you picked up from the evidence from the consortia, the national model came into train in 2012 and we're now in 2017 and there are still issues in the system. So, it does take considerable time. And, obviously, if there are some major changes or major turbulence to the arrangements or the structures, then that could well increase the time it takes for the next iteration to bed down slightly. So, that's a risk.

[268] Our benefits, in terms of having service footprints, as is suggested in the White Paper, that are coterminous—because the coterminosity of services enables better multi-agency working, for example, to happen—. It enables some services: support for vulnerable learners who need support from the school improvement service, support from the ALN service, and they may need support from social inclusion services. If those services are mapped conterminously, obviously it means smoother operation between those services for the benefit of the end user—for the benefit of the learner.

[269] I think one of the issues that we're discussing in-house at the moment, because we will formally respond to the White Paper in three weeks' time—that's the deadline—one of the issues we're discussing internally are the benefits of having a model that is more coterminous, or models that are sitting on different footprints for different services, and how that would operationally impact on the benefits for the learner and the citizen.

[270] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, on balance, is there a view that there should be—and I understand it's difficult to respond fully—is there a view, in terms of outcomes for young people and outcomes for the children of Wales that the regional consortia should embed further and continue with the work that they're doing, perhaps differently governed, or is it more beneficial, in your view, if you can articulate it, to work along the White Paper principles of a coterminous footprint, wherever it's possible to align it? Obviously, that could mean chucking all the balls up in the air and starting again.

[271] **Mr Brown:** I think it's worth a view back to history with this. As you're aware, when we had the last inspection cycle, which finished in 2014 in local authorities, 15 of the 22 ended up in some sort of follow-up. The one area that we were very critical of was the quality of school improvement services in those local authorities, simply because, as we've reported at different committees such as children, young people and education, one of the issues was that the very small authorities don't have the economies of scale or the specialist staff to deliver the quality of services needed. So, the regional consortia seemed to be a logical way forward, other than total council reorganisation—a good way forward of bringing in those economies of scale across a larger region. So, that was a plus point for the national model. I think, going forward—. Can you repeat the middle part of your question? Sorry, I've—

[272] **Rhianon Passmore:** Really, it's in terms of if Estyn have a view in terms of the optimum outcomes for children and young people in Wales as to whether it's preferable to continue as we are at the moment, in terms of the embedding of the consortia, or whether it would be preferable to move on to a more regional footprint so that coterminosity with others is going to assist in that generic provision.

[273] **Mr Brown:** I think you're correct. I think coterminosity is something you ought to aim for, but which coterminosity? As the White Paper suggests, there's a health footprint—that's one possible footprint—and there are the economic regions—another footprint. Probably the economic regions have an additional benefit over health, in that if you think of pre-16 education going through into post-16, and an alignment, so that you've got schools and post-16 providers mapping the skillset in a region to the economic skills of a particular region, using labour market information ultimately, the economic footprint on an economic model tends to make sense, because you're then developing learners who've got the necessary skills for the economic market within their region, assuming there's not a lot of cross-Wales movement of labour at the moment.

[274] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, in your view, then, is it preferable to authorise or enable the consortia to remain as they are and continue to embed as they are?

[275] **Mr Brown:** The consortia, as they currently stand, are improving—they're maturing, which I think was the word used in the previous session. They are embedding, but whichever model comes out as the predominant

model of health or economic footprint, there may have to be some movement. For example, the issue of Bridgend being one—where would Bridgend have to shift in terms of mapping against the existing consortia models?

[276] If you look at the map that's in the White Paper, that geographical map—and I can't remember the page number—is a pretty good fit to the consortia as they currently stand.

[277] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, you would view the consortia as a model for improvement, alongside leadership within schools, as a sound way for Wales to move forward in terms of improvement.

[278] **Mr Brown:** I think regional working for school improvement—. The way forward is going to be regional. I think we've gone over that particular tipping point.

[279] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay, thank you.

[280] **Nick Ramsay:** Done? Mohammad Asghar.

[281] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair. Good afternoon. The chief inspector of Estyn recently outlined in evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee that consortia need to better analyse performance data on different pupil groups, including their gender and ability. Given this, what are your expectations of the consortia in this regard, please?

[282] **Mr Campion:** I'm happy to answer that point. When we inspected all the consortia last year, it was very clear that they have a lot of data. A lot of information is being shared appropriately in the system, but our concern, really, related to the analysis of those data and the evaluation based on those data. It tended to be very focused on national headline indicators and for large groups of pupils, which didn't sit comfortably, actually, with some of what their day-to-day work was doing. So, the best challenge advisers in Wales are in schools and helping schools to understand how well vulnerable learners are doing in the school and how well more able children are doing in that particular school. When you get to the regional level, they were not using their data well enough to fully understand whether vulnerable pupils in the region were generally doing as well as vulnerable learners were doing in the other regions, and the same with more able pupils. So, you may see, at a

school level, individual schools saying, 'We want to set higher targets. We want to challenge ourselves to get more pupils to attain five A*s and As at GCSE', for example, but that wouldn't necessarily feed through into a regional strategy how they are all ensuring that they are challenging schools to attain the highest levels for all children.

[283] If you want to summarise it broadly, it would be that they were aiming at the middle—the level 2-plus threshold—which is what everybody knows. It's the indicator that the public generally know and I think it's what schools have focused on a lot, and Estyn inspections have put a lot of focus on in the previous cycle. But there is a risk that you miss out other children—that doesn't capture all children; there are children who won't reach level 2 and there are children who should be well beyond a C grade at level 2 in GCSEs. And that's just talking about that part of the secondary system. It's understanding primary schools and also what happens beyond at 16 in sixth forms and so on as well. So, they've got the information—it's about the better use of that information, and also then linking it to their improvement strategies.

[284] You heard, I think, Hannah Woodhouse, in particular, talking about the work they are doing to improve the quality of their evaluation. We were critical of most of the consortia in our inspections around their evaluation, and Central South was one where we had a long discussion with them during their inspection about what they were doing to understand the impact of their work. What we were finding in the early days of the consortia was that school improvement officers were very busy, very active with schools, sometimes on projects that spanned across an entire region, but they didn't think about evaluation at the start of their work—they didn't build that in. That situation is much better now than it was, but, of course, you're then talking about time to be able to actually then pick up on the impact of the work you do. School improvement can be quite a slow, long-term process and not something you necessarily get results from overnight.

[285] **Mohammad Asghar:** Right, thank you. Another point: the White Paper has been mentioned—has Estyn identified similar concerns to those raised by the NASUWT about the responsibility of the consortia for providing human resources support for schools in the context of the role of local authorities as the employer?

[286] **Mr Brown:** I don't think—. We picked up, when we did the remit and when we did the inspections, issues about variability in the HR advice.

Schools were telling us that the HR advice they were getting was variable. But it's one of those things, again, that is an area of clarity, I think. This has obviously been the theme of this afternoon, I think—the clarity of the national model and where HR advice should sit. Should it sit with the local authority as the general employer of the teachers in a school, or should it sit with the regional consortia as advisers to the leadership teams in a school? I think it's one of those areas that, in some cases, has fallen between two stools in terms of the quality of the advice given.

16:00

[287] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee Waters.

[288] **Lee Waters:** Do you think it's helpful having two players in this, in the LEAs and the consortia? Do you still think that's the model we should proceed with?

[289] **Mr Brown:** Well, that's the model we have.

[290] **Lee Waters:** Indeed. My question was: is it helpful?

[291] **Mr Brown:** As I said, going back to my previous response, some of the local authorities were having difficulties, and these are the ones that tended to go into special measures, or we advised the Welsh Government to put them into 'in need of significant improvement'. Because of the sheer size of them—they are very small—delivering a high-quality school improvement service is difficult when you've got a limited amount of resource for advisers, as they were called; school advisers. You've got limited capacity for training, and so forth. There were earlier attempts by previous Ministers to ask authorities to do some sort of voluntary mergers to form themselves as larger units in terms of economies of scale. That process didn't operate, so I think the regional consortia then had to come in as a model to enable that to happen.

[292] The issue at the moment as well is that statutory responsibility lies with the local authority. The Education Reform Act 1988 specifies legal functions—

[293] **Lee Waters:** I understand all of that. I'm just wondering: do you have a view on whether or not that is a good arrangement that we should continue with?

[294] **Mr Brown:** It's an arrangement that is currently working, and it's an arrangement that I think the White Paper is trying to address. The White Paper addresses issues about joint governance arrangements. It addresses issues about scrutiny of services and talks about the scrutiny of elected members at local authority level, and how that can then be put up to a joint governance model in terms of joint scrutiny. So, I think it's a live debate. I won't express a preference one way or another, but I think it's a live debate to be had.

[295] **Lee Waters:** You don't have a view, as an inspector, whether or not it might be better, for example, to pick one or the other.

[296] **Mr Brown:** Not at the moment. I think that's a political decision.

[297] **Lee Waters:** But it has an impact on performance, doesn't it, which is your responsibility. I just wondered if you thought that model was getting in the way of delivering standards.

[298] **Mr Brown:** Not at the moment, no. It's work in train.

[299] **Lee Waters:** Okay. I wonder if you can help my understanding. We discussed this with witnesses at the end. My recollection of the chief inspector—and he gave evidence before the end of September, and I just checked the Record—is that he did say that, as you were developing a new framework for local government, there would be a pause whilst the picture across Wales became clearer in terms of the Government's intentions for the future of local government reform, which hadn't been announced at the time. They would be proceeding with the regional consortia, but in the interim there would be a gap where local authorities—this was true as of September—would not be proceeded with for an inspection framework. Has that situation changed since then?

[300] **Mr Brown:** I think that recollection is correct. There was an article in the *Western Mail* around about that time that said that Estyn has stopped inspecting local authorities, which was completely untrue. We hadn't stopped inspecting local authorities, and we're not going to stop inspecting local authorities. What the chief inspector was referring to is the fact that we finished a cycle of core inspections in 2014; 15 of the 22 local authorities went into some sort of follow-up category. Therefore, we needed to do follow-up work with them and we had follow-up visits, we re-inspected

some of the authorities, and it took until January 2016 for all those authorities to come out of a follow-up category. In the meantime, we were asked by the Minister to inspect the regional consortia, so, in that gap year, as you call it, we did two pieces of work: one, we did a piece of remit work, and we were working jointly alongside the Wales Audit Office with that; and then in January to June 2016 we inspected the local authorities and we had Wales Audit Office colleagues with us on the team, and formally reported on the effectiveness of the regional consortia at that point.

[301] We were also cognisant of the fact that we had to stop and re-evaluate how we inspected local authorities, because the previous administration had a White Paper running that had implications for the way that inspectorates work together. So, we were looking at developing a new framework. When a new administration came in, as you are aware, that particular White Paper was shelved, and we've now got the current situation with the 'Reforming Local Government' paper. We are now in the process of—. Well, we've started work on the new framework. We have just finished consulting; we had about 100-odd responses to our consultation about how we should take forward local authority inspection. We met with all the directors of education—about two weeks ago, I think it was, Clive—and we set up a stakeholder reference group, which is SOLACE, ADEW, the WLGA, the Wales Audit Office, CSSIW and Welsh Government. In fact, we're meeting on 30 March, our first meeting, to discuss how we're going to take forward local authority inspection. We will then pilot the inspections at the end of this year, and then we'll start a new framework in 2018. So, it was, as you say, a temporary pause while other local government work went on alongside.

[302] **Lee Waters:** So, how long will the gap have been in total between the end of the last inspection and the inspection—

[303] **Mr Brown:** Well, if we take the inspection cycle as being the core inspection plus follow-up, the gap would have been when the last authority came out of follow-up in early 2016—January 2016.

[304] **Lee Waters:** Right, and the new one will be fully operational by when?

[305] **Mr Brown:** Sorry—?

[306] **Mr Phillips:** September 2018.

[307] **Lee Waters:** Right, so between January 2016 and September 2018,

there won't have been any systematic—

[308] **Mr Brown:** We have got pilots; we'll be doing pilot inspections.

[309] **Lee Waters:** I just want to get clarity for the record. So, from January 2016 to September 2018, there won't have been any systematic local authority inspections. Is that right?

[310] **Mr Champion:** The other thing to throw in is that we do other inspections—

[311] **Lee Waters:** Sorry, is that correct?

[312] **Mr Champion:** I'm going to just give a rider on it, really, which is that there is other inspection activity that is ongoing with local authorities, and it is inspection activity because we do the work under the same legislation, which is what I think Arwyn Thomas referred to in your last session of link inspector work with authorities. So, at least once a term we have link inspectors who are spending time visiting the local authority observing scrutiny sessions, challenging officers and meeting with the consortium representatives. That's ongoing—

[313] **Lee Waters:** But the inspection activity won't have been a full inspection for that period.

[314] **Mr Phillips:** What we have been doing as well—

[315] **Lee Waters:** Sorry, is that correct, yes?

[316] **Mr Champion:** That's different from a core inspection, but it is still inspection.

[317] **Lee Waters:** I understand that. So, the correct summary is that between January 2016 and September 2018, there has been inspection activity but not full inspections of the LEAs. Is that a correct understanding?

[318] **Mr Phillips:** Yes, that's correct.

[319] **Lee Waters:** Right, thank you.

[320] **Mr Phillips:** But just to elaborate on some of the other activities we

have been doing, we have piloted improvement conferences in two local authorities during the last term as well, where we get all the key players around the table to discuss particular issues pertaining to those authorities, to get underneath some of the issues that we felt they needed to address, and to get an understanding of how well those authorities were understanding those issues and had plans in place to address and to drive improvement. So, we've done that in two authorities—

[321] **Lee Waters:** And how have they gone?

[322] **Mr Phillips:** Pardon?

[323] **Lee Waters:** How have they gone?

[324] **Mr Phillips:** As a process, we thought that the improvement conference was an effective tool for us to identify and recognise—and for the local authorities to identify and recognise—what they needed to do to improve. We've left them with clear recommendations about what they need to do to improve, and we'll be going back in a year's time to test out whether those improvements have been delivered. So, whether the improvement conferences will have an impact—i.e. whether they have driven improvement—we will ascertain in a year's time. But it is a process we are trying out. It's something slightly different, and I think, as you said, having all the key players around the table, including colleagues from the WAO, was something worth trying, and I think time will tell whether it does have an impact on actual outcomes there as well.

[325] **Lee Waters:** Okay, thank you.

[326] **Nick Ramsay:** Mohammad Asghar, did you have any more questions?

[327] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair. Going through this survey—this teachers' professional learning survey—actually, there are not very many good remarks from the teachers in this survey that was sent to them; it is between pages 84 to 95, but I think there are more than that. If you look at pages 96 to 97, they're very interesting. Not a single person is happy with what the consortia are doing, and I think they're saying there's a contradiction between Estyn and the consortia's approach towards schools and teachers. What do you say about that? Look at the comments—it's not me; it's the teachers. It's really very strong wording there. I don't want to quote it here.

[328] **Mr Phillips:** I think there is a perception by some schools, by some teachers, that our view of their school contradicts what the consortium may say about that school. I think it's a matter of methodology and what the challenge advisers are focusing on. They are heavily driven by what's in the national model and they look at data as a starting point to ascertain the category of the school, for example, whereas Estyn inspectors' evidence encompasses a far more rounded, more detailed evaluation of school's performance. For example, inspectors observe teaching, talk to pupils, talk to teachers, talk to governors, talk to parents, evaluate the work in the pupils' books, consider pupils' views through questionnaires, for example. So, the findings of an Estyn inspection may differ from that of a challenge adviser's view of that school.

[329] After saying that, we do look at the challenge advisers' pre-inspection reports, and we match what they say with our inspection findings. And, over the past two or three years, we have found that there is a much closer match between what the challenge advisers are telling us about their schools, and what our inspectors are also finding. For example, in 2014–15, we had the mismatch, as it were, or we had some concerns about roughly a quarter of the reports submitted by challenge advisers. They didn't identify the school as we saw it. But, up to this point, during this academic year, that figure has gone down to about 12 per cent. So, the match is much, much closer. So, you may find that schools at this point will say that we are saying, and what challenge advisers or consortia are saying about the school, do roughly match up from the evidence that we've gleaned from our inspections.

[330] **Nick Ramsay:** Rhianon Passmore.

[331] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. In regard to the evolving role of Estyn—and we've obviously mentioned inspections quite a lot earlier—is there a need for—not less independence, but is there a need for more joined-up working and mechanisms, structurally, for yourselves and the consortia, in terms of differing mandates, I agree, but common purposes in terms of improving outcomes for young people in Wales?

[332] **Mr Campion:** Can I make a point on that? I think one of the things we picked up early on in our first piece of—. Our remit report for the consortia noted that there was an imbalance between challenge and support, and one of our concerns was that they were overcorrecting in terms of challenging schools, and we do now know that they are much better at understanding

where schools are at, but that's only part of the story, isn't it? It's all very well knowing where a school is at; it's helping that school to improve, knowing what advice and support, knowing how to pair it up with other schools, knowing what might work, looking at research and so on. That's the bit that still needs some work on it. And we certainly were concerned where consortia staff were almost replicating the work of inspectors. That's not the role that they need to play.

[333] We have seen improvements in their ability to support schools, and, increasingly, that role of support is headteachers themselves. And I think you heard a number of different models described, but essentially, it's the same things, whereas previously it was teams of advisers that were centrally employed and that was their full-time job, whereas now, the role is often carried out by a serving headteacher or a serving deputy, or perhaps, if it's a subject focus, like maths or English, it may be a head of department from a successful school. They are carrying out those roles for one year, two years, part-time or full-time. So, you have current practitioners who are involved in the system, and that's certainly, I think, behind some of the improvements that we've seen in the quality of support, on the back of the quality of challenge in the system.

16:15

[334] **Mr Brown:** I think to add to that, the other issue, which is Mark touched on, is school-to-school support. We made a comment in the annual report that some of the regional consortia were good at setting up—brokering—schools together and matching schools up, setting up a family of schools and then continuing to support them, and seeing how they were developing and giving them resource to do it, whereas we saw one or two other consortia that were a bit more variable—they'd set up a family of schools and then, basically, leave them to it. They tended to wither on the vine in that case—they needed that little input from the consortia just to keep the energy in the system. But, I think that's a pattern now that we're seeing is beginning to improve.

[335] I think one of the things I should caveat our comments with here as well is, of course, in terms of timing this meeting, we are going back in the autumn to look at the progress they've made and then formally reporting on that progress. So, a lot of the comments, and a lot of the intelligence we'll pick up here, is intelligence from the work, as Mark mentioned, the link inspectors have been doing in the authorities—talking to schools, and

finding out and getting a feel for what the consortia had operated, and how much they'd progressed with the recommendations that we gave them, and the Wales Audit Office gave them, back last year.

[336] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay. So, just to add one more point, then, in regard to the general synergy—notwithstanding the role of an inspectorate—is there room for more joined-up thinking between yourselves and the consortia, or is that completely outside of your mandate and remit, bearing in mind that you've mentioned duplication?

[337] **Mr Brown:** I think what's happening is that there's more joined-up thinking between the regional consortia, the authorities and Welsh Government when it comes to putting together a national self-improving school system—that's where the synergy is operating.

[338] **Rhianon Passmore:** So, you don't see that there's anything more to add value from your, obviously, independent inspectorate role, in terms of the consortia mandate?

[339] **Mr Brown:** I think one of the points that Lee was raising at the beginning of the last session was best practice. One of our roles is to identify where we see best practice happening. To signal that up to the system, we publish our inspection reports, and, when we do training events or we hold conferences, we'll showcase people who are doing that sort of work.

[340] **Rhianon Passmore:** That's particularly in an area—Chair, if I may—in terms of development that's occurring and emergent now—there's a general consensus from all of us in the committee, and from the consortia, that that needs to happen more, and that you don't have separate consortia in their little silos trying to improve on their indicators. So, I think you would say that that's partly your role to do as well.

[341] **Mr Brown:** At a national level, yes—one of Estyn's roles.

[342] **Mr Campion:** If I can add as well, one of the key strengths of the inspection system in Wales in recent years has been the use of peer inspectors on school inspections but also in our work in local authorities. Challenge advisers in Wales have all had Estyn training, and they are all used on school inspections, monitoring visits and so on. We're reviewing that process at the moment to make sure we get it right.

[343] There is a tension between—the consortia would like their challenge advisers to be Estyn trained and live on inspections during the year, because that gives them a real insight into how we're working and that adds value to what they can do. But, they don't want to lose them for any days in the year either, because they want them to work in the schools because they've got limited resource. So, we're just refining how it works, but I think that that is part of the strength of the inspection system in Wales. Of course, a lot of the peer inspectors on the regular school inspections that happen, week after week, are headteachers, who are also the headteachers who are seconded out by the consortia in various consultative roles for other schools.

[344] **Mr Brown:** Going back to the question about the next cycle of local authority inspections, one of the discussions we had with ADEW a couple of weeks ago was what their appetite was for senior officers from the local authorities, and from the consortia, to act as peer inspectors on the inspections of local authorities, which is a further extension of what Mark was saying. We're building capacity, we're putting expertise back in the system and we're bringing people out and training them in how to evaluate and how to make judgments, in terms of quality of teaching and quality of leadership, and then we're putting those people back in the system so that those skill sets then operate at the system level within local authorities and the consortia.

[345] **Rhianon Passmore:** Finally, and it might lead into a different area, in that regard, how much of an issue is that capacity deficit that's been highlighted through the leadership academy that was discussed earlier today? We didn't really get to the bottom of that in any major sense.

[346] **Mr Brown:** I think anybody would acknowledge that capacity in the system within Wales at the moment is an issue, both in terms of recruitment and retention. One of the benefits of the national academy for leadership, when it sets up, is that not only will it develop existing leaders, but, hopefully, it will grow talent in the system as well. In Wales, if we grow the talent in terms of leadership, Wales may well be seen by other parts of the UK as the place to come and work. There are significant issues about recruitment—recruitment at a leadership level, recruitment at middle management and teachers, particularly perhaps in more rural areas of Wales. For some reason, people seem reluctant to move into those areas to seek employment.

[347] **Nick Ramsay:** Lee Waters, did you have a supplementary?

[348] **Lee Waters:** Yes, thank you. So, you mentioned that there has been improvement in the performance of the consortia in the last 12 months, but there's still work to be done in terms of the consistency of the support, in particular, on offer to schools. In your data, you've decided not to try to capture the performance of the consortia in having an impact on school improvement, because of the difficulty of matching the data with their boundaries. Is that something you hope to put right in the medium term or the near future?

[349] **Mr Campion:** I'll take that one. I think you actually heard good answers from the colleagues who were here before us on two counts that we would agree with. One is an understanding of what constitutes school improvement—so, what the consortia do is a part of school improvement activity, but there are other aspects to school improvement that are not within the control of the consortia and are very much within the control of the local authority. So, for example, school organisation is a local authority issue. Local authorities have powers of intervention—the consortia don't have the powers of intervention. I could list a whole load of other areas, including additional learning needs. There are lots of other things that affect how well schools are doing—and seeking to support and address them with the issues that they have. So, that's part of the answer.

[350] The other part of the answer, really, is about where policy goes in Wales, and whilst you have the situation we currently do, where you effectively have two middle layers with local authorities and consortia, it's extremely difficult to attribute the standards of schools in that region to that regional service, whilst those local authorities exist with their statutory responsibilities and a range of other services. So, actually, although there's an issue of time, which I think one of the managing directors rightly referred to, and that was our initial issue, it was far too early—. You're thinking about children who are leaving at 16 and how long they've been in the education system, and the extent to which the consortia will have impacted on their education. How much cause and effect can you attribute then to the consortium when you're looking at those standards? So, what we put in our reports was an evaluation of standards at a regional level. We can do it—we can say what standards look like in this region and we can say whether more able children do well in this region or not, but to attribute that solely to the work of a regional consortium at this stage would be unwise and unfair. Whilst the policy stays as it currently is, that would still be difficult in five years' time, actually.

[351] **Lee Waters:** It's an entirely fair point, but it does return to the question I've tried to get Simon Brown to give a clear view on, and he seemed reticent to do so at the beginning. In terms of accountability, would it be better if we didn't have the LEAs and the consortia—that we had one or the other? We then would be able to have a clear view on who was responsible for standards and who was influencing the system.

[352] **Mr Brown:** I think that's an issue that's picked up in my paper, because local authorities, as I say, have got a number of statutory functions—school improvement is one, support for ALN is a second, support for social inclusion, and, as Mark said, school organisation. Those are statutory functions in law. Now, one of those functions—school improvement—is being delivered by the consortia. There's no statutory background for them doing it, but they're doing it. If those other functions—. If there was an appetite to get rid of local authorities as we currently know them, then that's an issue that I think needs to be teased out as part of reforming local government, because—

[353] **Lee Waters:** That's what I'm trying to tease out of you, with respect. Would that be helpful?

[354] **Mr Brown:**—all that legislation would have to go up to a regional level.

[355] **Lee Waters:** Regardless of how we get there—let us worry about that—in terms of its impact on school standards and performance, would it be better not to have local authorities in the picture and ensure clear accountability from the regional consortia? I'm not expressing a view—I'm trying to elicit your view from an independent inspector point of view. Would that be better for getting clearer accountability and performance from the system—to have fewer players on the stage?

[356] **Mr Champion:** You're asking a question that is coming at it from one particular perspective, though. So, it's asking to give an answer to a question to solve one particular issue, which is, 'Can we attribute the standards to the work of—?' There are lots of other questions you can ask about whether we should have local authorities or regions, which might give you different answers to a question. That's why I think we're very reluctant to give a particular answer to that one—it's a policy decision.

[357] **Nick Ramsay:** So, simply replacing the existing structure with a

simplified structure where you just had, say, the regional consortia wouldn't necessarily deliver, automatically, the benefits you might expect.

[358] **Mr Champion:** If you had a single middle tier, it would be easier to attribute the outcomes for learners to that single entity—of course it would. But, there are other considerations about where we are at the moment and whether it's the right time—

[359] **Nick Ramsay:** What you would lose by doing that—the other aspects you'd lose by doing that. Yes, okay. Neil McEvoy, did you have a supplementary question?

[360] **Neil McEvoy:** Just following on from what Lee was saying, really. They were sat here earlier and said that, in 2012, they didn't have a clear idea of what the model was or where they were going, and there's clearly confusion as to who is responsible and accountable for what. As an open question, how can that happen?

[361] **Mr Brown:** Without going back over the post mortem, I think that any future national models that emerge, or any developments of a national model, really need to have three or four things about them. One is that it's made exactly clear what the responsibilities of the consortia, the responsibility of local authorities, the responsibilities of Welsh Government and the responsibility of schools are. I think one of the issues with the national model, when it first emerged in 2012, was that it was a model that was developing quite quickly and some of that clarity wasn't there in the original model. That also comes to my second point, which is: once you have that clarity about who is responsible for what and how it's delivered, it's then about communicating it—it's a point that was picked up in the previous session.

[362] The communication of who does what needs to be absolutely crystal clear across the system, and I think it's not just giving the message once—it's giving a continuous message out to the system, using different media to broadcast. The surveys have picked up that most headteachers—80 per cent, depending on what statistics you use—have got it, so they understand what's happening with the regional consortia. There are a number of heads who haven't, but I think it's then how you communicate that through the system, so that the teaching workforce also understands, governing bodies understand and also, dare I say, in some cases, in some of the local authorities, scrutiny committee elected members fully understand how the

system operates. So, I think that clarity of purpose and clarity of roles, and communicating that across the system, is a very important factor, or factors, that needs to be put into the next national model and the iteration of it.

[363] **Neil McEvoy:** We tell children that they should have clear goals with their studies, and yet we're sat here being told that there was no clear goal for the consortia, really—I suppose that's a comment rather than a question. I'll leave my—. There are only a couple of minutes left—I'll let another colleague come in if they want to.

[364] **Nick Ramsay:** Rhianon Passmore.

[365] **Rhianon Passmore:** Thank you. In regard to consistency, clarity and data sharing, would it be simpler if there was one governance model—also in terms of scrutiny—for all of the consortia? Would that assist in any shape or way, or not? Would that not be a factor?

[366] **Mr Brown:** I get the impression, reading through the White Paper, that that's what the White Paper is aiming at—a joint governance model. The discussion to be had is how that joint governance arrangement then operates at the local authority level. I think the point was well made at the previous session that there's also a role there for schools as the consumers of the system to have an input into it.

[367] **Rhianon Passmore:** What would that be?

[368] **Mr Brown:** If one assumes a democratic model, the schools have got an input into the system via their elected members in local councils, who then have an input into the joint model at joint-governance level.

[369] **Rhianon Passmore:** Okay, thank you.

[370] **Nick Ramsay:** That's fine. We've only got a few minutes left. I'm aware that Neil Hamilton still has his questions to ask. Neil, over to you.

[371] **Neil Hamilton:** You'll have heard in the last session that Lee Waters said that in our survey fewer than a quarter of respondents ascribed any improvement in their school to the work and advice of the relevant consortium, and you'll have heard the witnesses respond to a similar question from me by saying it's really all a question of perception.

16:30

[372] I'm familiar with this argument because whenever I've won an election, that's down to my brilliant powers of communication with the electorate, and when I've lost, it's all their fault for being myopic. So I wonder whether you could shed any light on how we answer that question. Is it a question of perception? Or is there something more to it?

[373] **Mr Campion:** We carried out our own perception survey in January last year, and it's live at the moment—we're repeating it. We had responses from nearly 600 headteachers. A large proportion responded. We found that the majority of them, at 68 per cent, felt that their school got the support it needed following categorisation. That means there's a third of headteachers who didn't feel that, and therefore you are inevitably going to have a considerable number of teachers that, for whatever reason, don't feel they're necessarily getting what they feel they need to support them to improve. I think, to be fair, some of the responses you had have a degree of truth in them about teachers, and sometimes even headteachers, not really understanding where their support is coming from. You might say that's a branding issue, or a communication issue, and that may well be the case. I think, sometimes, teachers at the classroom level may well be unaware of how they've got the support they've got. But, nevertheless, the fundamental question behind it—Hannah and Debbie Hartevelde made the point too—is: are they getting the support they need, full stop? In a sense, it doesn't matter where that support comes from. Are they getting the support they need? Is the school improving? Is the system as a whole improving?

[374] So, I think our survey will concur. We will happily share with you our latest data. I think it might be this week or next week that our survey finishes this year, and we are happy to provide you with the updated information on the views of headteachers and chairs of governors this year, as to whether the situation has improved in their school. We have a view that we will work with ADEW and with the managing directors going forward, probably, to look at the survey we run, and maybe work on developing it with them, so that the questions we ask nationally are questions that are helpful to everybody.

[375] What isn't helpful, actually, is where lots of people carry out lots of surveys. You get survey fatigue. We've been consulting on our new inspection arrangements this year with schools. That's inevitably going to affect how many complete this particular survey. We're running it ourselves, and we've run more than one ourselves in this year, and so you do get a bit

of that. I know that's slightly outside the question, but it's something we're mindful of, so that you get the views of all of those in the system feeding in to what's going on.

[376] **Mr Brown:** If the Chair would like that survey, we can arrange for that to be sent through to you.

[377] **Nick Ramsay:** It would be very helpful if you could provide us with that. Thank you.

[378] **Neil Hamilton:** You will have heard also, following on from that, Lee Waters saying earlier that it would be rather bizarre that such a high proportion of heads fail to understand why it was that their schools were improving. How can that be? You just said that in your own survey a third of your respondents amongst heads thought that the consortium that was relevant to them had played no part, or no great part, in the results that had been achieved.

[379] **Mr Phillips:** I think our colleague from Ceredigion's answer sort of concurs with the idea that maybe these heads aren't particularly engaged with the consortia. And they're reticent to acknowledge any good work that they do. So I think it's something around that as well.

[380] **Neil Hamilton:** It speaks for itself, I think.

[381] **Nick Ramsay:** Any final questions? Lee.

[382] **Lee Waters:** I just wanted absolute clarity, for my own peace of mind if nothing else, on the question of whether or not you are likely to try and capture the efficacy of the consortia on standards in your data. And I understood your answer to be that probably wouldn't be useful because there are too many variables at play. Is that a correct understanding—that you're not going to try and capture a judgment on that?

[383] **Mr Campion:** You have national indicators over here, you have school improvement services working over here, and a lot happens in between there. What we don't want to do is just take a number over here and say it's because of this group over there.

[384] **Lee Waters:** No, I understand that. So, because of the difficulties, you're probably not going to try and do it?

[385] **Mr Champion:** We're expecting them to evaluate better what they do, so they can attribute improvements in individual schools to the programmes that they've been putting into place, or the support networks with other schools they've putting into place. And that's what you'll have heard the managing directors and the directors talking about, is the research work they're been doing with universities and so on, so they can better understand what they've got and the impact that that is having. We expect them to do that evaluation themselves.

[386] **Lee Waters:** Okay, that's clear. Thank you very much.

[387] **Nick Ramsay:** Okay, great. Can I thank our witnesses from Estyn for being with us today? It's been really helpful. Thanks for helping out with our look at the regional education consortia. We will send you a transcript before it's totally finalised, so you can check it for accuracy. Thanks for being with us today.

[388] **Mr Brown:** Thank you very much.

[389] **Mr Champion:** Thank you.

[390] **Mr Phillips:** Thank you.

16:35

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd
o'r Cyfarfod**

**Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public
from the Meeting**

Cynnig:

Motion:

bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu that the committee resolves to gwahardd y cyhoedd o weddill y exclude the public from the cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol Sefydlog remainder of the meeting in 17.42(vi).

accordance with Standing Order 17.42(vi).

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.

Motion moved.

[391] **Nick Ramsay:** I now propose we go into private session. So, in accordance with Standing Order 17.42, we go private.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 16:35.

The public part of the meeting ended at 16:35.