

## **Written Response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee's Report on Welsh in Education Strategic Plans by Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills**

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In April 2010 the Welsh Government published its Welsh-medium Education Strategy (WMES) aimed at improving the status and planning of Welsh-medium education, and at improving standards in Welsh (both first and second language) as a subject. The Strategy articulated the Welsh Government's vision:

“...to have an education and training system that responds in a planned way to the growing demand for Welsh-medium education, reaches out to and reflects our diverse communities and enables an increase in the number of people of all ages and backgrounds who are fluent in Welsh and able to use the language with their families, in their communities and in the workplace.”

The Strategy includes fixed five-year and indicative ten-year targets based on outcomes. Tangible progress against these targets would then be measured within a more effective, accountable and coherent planning system. Central to this planning system is the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP).

The first WESPs, prepared by local authorities and submitted to Welsh Ministers from 2012, were on a non-statutory basis. As such, Welsh Ministers could not formally approve, modify or reject them since there were no statutory provisions in place to enable them to do so. However, Welsh Government provided local authorities with detailed feedback and face to face discussions about the Plans. Local authorities responded favourably to this process and amended their WESPs accordingly. This proved a useful preparation for the advent of statutory WESPs following the passage of the School Standards and Organisation Act 2013.

In brief, a local authority is under a duty to prepare a plan explaining how it will improve the planning of Welsh-medium education, and improve standards, together with its targets for improvement and progress reports. The Act also sets out the arrangements which a local authority must make in terms of public consultation about the Plan, its submission to Welsh Ministers and the subsequent publication of the approved WESP.

Welsh Ministers' functions in relation to a WESP are to approve a plan as submitted, approve it with modifications, or reject it and prepare another plan, which is to be treated as the authority's approved plan. Where Welsh Ministers propose to modify or reject a plan they must consult the local authority. In practice, consultation has taken the form of a formal letter outlining the proposed modifications to which the local authority must respond within 14 days.

The provisions of the 2013 Act are further amplified by the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013. In brief, these Regulations set out more detailed arrangements for conducting a Welsh-medium education assessment (to measure demand), the duration of a plan, its form and content, its submission to Welsh Ministers, the timing

and manner of publication, further provisions as regards consultation, and the review of a plan. They also set out in more detail the matters to be dealt with in a plan.

Welsh Government has issued guidelines to local authorities about the contents of a WESP reflecting both the requirements of the Regulations and the priorities of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy. Plans, which therefore, cover 7 broad areas/outcomes:

**Outcome 1: More seven-year-old children being taught through the medium of Welsh**

Among the issues which local authorities must address are plans for increasing the numbers in Welsh-medium education; the processes for measuring demand for Welsh-medium childcare and statutory education provision; links to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School programme; arrangements for immersion schemes and latecomers; the establishment of a Welsh-medium Education Forum; information to parents; and how the local authority discharges its duty under section 10 of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to promote access to Welsh-medium education and training through the medium of Welsh.

**Outcome 2: More learners continuing to improve their language skills on transfer from primary to secondary school**

This outcome focusses on the arrangements for increasing the percentage of Year 9 pupils assessed in Welsh as a first language together with developing more effective transfer arrangements from early years/childcare through to Key Stage 4 with a particular emphasis on linguistic continuity.

**Outcome 3: More learners aged 14 to 16 studying for qualifications through the medium of Welsh**

**Outcome 4: More learners aged 16 to 19 studying subjects through the medium of Welsh in schools, colleges and work-based learning**

These outcomes are taken together. In the case of Outcome 3 the focus is on increasing the percentage of learners in Year 11 studying for 5 or more qualifications through the medium of Welsh. In the case of Outcome 4 the focus is on 2 or more subjects through the medium of Welsh. In both cases, local authorities are expected to explain how they support schools in maximising the take-up of subjects through the medium of Welsh, and how they work with others e.g. the 14 -19 Networks and Regional Forums.

**Outcome 5: More learners with higher skills in Welsh**

The main emphasis here is on standards – of literacy and numeracy, and in performance in Welsh as a first language and Welsh as a second language in statutory teacher assessments and external examinations across the Key Stages. Local authorities are expected to set targets for each. Local authorities are also expected to report on how they will reduce the percentage of non-entries for an external examination in Welsh as a second language at the end of Key Stage 4. In addition, local authorities are asked to outline how it encourages the use of Welsh outside the classroom. This is the Outcome to which the regional consortia make the greatest contribution.

### **Outcome 6: Welsh-medium provision for learners with Additional Learning Needs**

Among the issues which local authorities need to consider are how they assess additional learning needs in the Welsh-medium sector, the extent to which they are able to offer services and support through the medium of Welsh, and the strategies for bridging any gaps between identified needs and range of services on offer through the medium of Welsh.

### **Outcome 7: Workforce Planning and Continuous Professional Development**

This is primarily about strategies for securing sufficient numbers of practitioners with the requisite linguistic and methodological skills to deliver Welsh-medium education, including the use of the Welsh Government's Welsh Language Sabbatical Scheme.

The first statutory WESPs covering the period 2014 to 2017 were submitted to Welsh Ministers in December 2013 (as required by statute). 3 Plans were approved as submitted and 19 Plans were approved with modifications.

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013 require a local authority, no later than 20 December every year, to review its progress against the targets in its approved Plan and submit any revised Plan for approval by Welsh Ministers. The functions of Welsh Ministers in respect of a revised Plan are limited to approval as submitted or approval with modifications. 5 were approved as submitted and 17 with modifications.

In accordance with the 2013 Regulations local authorities undertook a further review of their progress against targets and submitted their revised Plans to Welsh Ministers by 20 December 2015. This provides a further opportunity to challenge local authorities on both the implementation of individual plans and their continuing progress towards meeting their targets.

Local authorities have had 3 years in which to develop and refine their WESPs but the extent to which Ministerial approval has required modifications suggests that there is still some way to go before they are sufficiently embedded in local authority processes to contribute more effectively to the targets and outcomes of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy.

The Government views the introduction of WESPs as an important component in creating the system necessary to improve both the planning for, and standards of Welsh-medium education. Whilst this mechanism has been accepted by local authorities, it is too early to judge the impact of the Plans, especially as the initial approval of WESPs and, subsequently, the revised Plans has involved considerable modifications.

Against that general background, Welsh Ministers welcome the Committee's Report as a further stimulus to the ongoing dialogue with local authorities and others about the ways in which Welsh in Education Strategic Plans should be developed and strengthened. While Welsh Ministers are content to accept the majority of the

Committee's recommendations (in full or in principle) it is not altogether clear that, in some cases, they are supported by strong and persuasive evidence. The Committee may wish to reflect on the fact that the absence of any recommendations aimed specifically at local authorities may represent a missed opportunity.

I have set out below my response to the Report's individual recommendations.

### **Detailed Responses to the report's recommendations are set out below:**

The Committee recommends that

R1: Welsh Government must ensure that WMES targets are reflected in WESPs and be more robust in its approval of WESPs to ensure they reflect Welsh Government's ambitions

#### **Response: Accept**

While the Welsh Government requires each local authority to set targets in its WESP, it should be understood that such targets must reflect the particular circumstances of each individual authority. By way of illustration, a local authority with a very low percentage of 7-year olds in Welsh-medium education – say under 10% in the 2009 baseline year – would have needed expansion of provision on a scale which was unlikely to be achieved if it was expected to meet the 25% target for 2015. Welsh Government accepts that its assessment of WESPs must be robust – and believes that they have been to date. It also believes that an insistence on targets which do not sufficiently acknowledge the particular circumstances of an authority, and what is realistic in those circumstances, will end up as little more than arbitrary and unattainable figures.

It should be noted that the most recent annual report on the Welsh-medium Education Strategy indicated that while the percentage of 7-year olds in Welsh-medium education was 22.2% in 2014 there are over 1,000 more learners in such provision compared with 2010, the highest figure since 2004. The Committee will readily appreciate that, viewed in isolation, the percentage figure does not necessarily tell the whole story since it is possible for the numbers in Welsh-medium to rise but the percentage to drop because the overall size of the cohort of 7-year olds has risen.

**Financial Implications:** None

The Committee recommends:

R2: Welsh Government must clarify how it intends to work in partnership with local authorities to deliver its Welsh-medium Education Strategy.

#### **Response: Accept**

Welsh Government already works in partnership with local authorities to deliver the Welsh-medium Education Strategy. The Strategy and the WESPs are closely aligned and the statutory responsibility for much of what is to be covered by the WESPs rests with local authorities. It would not be appropriate for Ministers to intervene directly in some areas e.g. the planning of school places, however, at the same time Welsh Ministers have statutory functions to exercise in respect of the Plans when submitted. These two factors inevitably shape the nature of the partnership. Welsh Government has facilitated the formulation of WESPs, both in terms of content and process, through various means, including:

- the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013;
- statutory guidance under section 87 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013;
- detailed written feedback on individual Plans;
- meetings with officers of every local authority which were formally minuted;
- annual workshops; and
- ad hoc meetings on specific WESP-related issues on request or at the instigation of Welsh Government.

In the past 12 months or so, Welsh Government has reined back from regular meetings in the belief that local authorities were now sufficiently well versed and experienced in both the process, the content and the expectations in relation to WESPs. However, following the assessment of the latest reviewed WESPs and in preparation for the next full 3-year Plans for the years 2017 – 2020 we will consider the possibility of a series of targeted meetings with some local authorities during 2016 and beyond. In addition, ad-hoc meetings with individual local authorities to discuss specific WESP-related issues will continue.

**Financial Implications:** None

The Committee recommends:

R3: The Minister should clarify how the recommendations of the Donaldson review will address the variance in the linguistic outcomes of different types of provision.

**Response: Accept**

In October 2015, Welsh Government published *A Curriculum for Wales, a curriculum for life*, a plan to take forward Professor Graham Donaldson's recommendations. This plan sets out the high level timeline for the new curriculum which schools and settings will teach from 2021.

Working with Welsh and international experts, the Pioneer Schools focussing on curriculum development will be at the forefront of designing the new curriculum and assessment arrangements for Wales. These Pioneers will work as part of an all-Wales partnership that will include curriculum and assessment experts and key stakeholders including employers, the further and higher education sectors and Estyn.

Pioneers have been drawn from across Wales and represent a range of different schools including rural and urban settings; bilingual, English-medium and Welsh-medium; primary, secondary and special schools; schools with a religious character, and a range of school sizes.

During the first phase of their work, the Pioneers leading on curriculum development will focus on designing the new curriculum structure before turning, later in 2016, to the development of the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) including the Languages, Literacy and Communication AoLE.

Professor Donaldson makes specific recommendations in relation to the Welsh language in Successful Futures including a renewed focus on learning Welsh primarily as a means of communication (particularly oral communication and understanding) as well as progression in the Welsh language towards transactional competence at age 16. These recommendations will guide the Pioneers with subject specific expertise who will work with experts to design the AoLE for Languages, Literacy and Communication as a whole. In developing this AoLE, a range of matters will be considered to ensure that all children and young people in Wales have the opportunity to successfully learn and progress in Welsh. The Pioneer Schools focussing on curriculum development will also work closely with those with a focus on the New Deal for the Education Workforce to equip our teaching profession with the requisite skills to reach this goal.

Welsh Government aim is for everyone to be able to use their Welsh with pride and confidence whatever their ability. The new curriculum will allow learners to make greater progress towards proficiency whatever their background and wherever in Wales they go to school.

In the interim while the new curriculum is being developed, Welsh Government will work with the regional Consortia and others to ensure that schools and learners following the current statutory Welsh Second Language programme of study have access to enhanced support to learn Welsh. This will include school-to-school support, digital learning, facilitating a wider offer of out-of-class Welsh language experiences, in addition to greater promotion of the benefits of learning Welsh and developing learners' integrated motivation. We will look to better support the enhancement of teacher skills and knowledge to ensure learner outcomes in Welsh improve and that our schools are better placed to embrace the new curriculum.

**Financial Implications: None.** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R4: The Minister should review and publish new guidance on definitions of provision and school linguistic categorisation.

**Response: Accept in principle**

The Welsh-medium Education Strategy includes a commitment “to review the effectiveness of the WAG guidelines *Defining Schools according to Welsh-medium Provision (2007)*”. Preparatory work has commenced. Implementation of this Recommendation will depend on the outcome of the review.

**Financial Implications: None.** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R5: The Minister should review the process for changing a school’s category, with the aim of simplifying it.

**Response: Reject**

The implementation of all legislation, including the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013, is monitored to assess whether it is working as intended. At present, there has been no indication that the process for changing a school’s category needs to be simplified. The revised legislation has provided a clear framework that enables proposals for change to be progressed in a timely way, whilst enabling local people to have a say. Some local authorities have reached final decisions about statutory proposals only 5 or so months after starting consultation even when there have been objections. This is a considerable improvement on the common timelines under the former legislation when Ministers needed to be involved in decision making on contested proposals. Local authorities need to consider whether the internal processes they have established for decision making both comply with the law, and support suitable progress.

The Committee recommends:

R6: Welsh Government should hold discussions with local authorities about timescales and arrangements for publishing annual reports on the progress of WESPs

**Response: Reject**

The possibility of requiring local authorities to produce and publish annual reports was considered during the drafting of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013 and rejected primarily because it would impose another burden on local authorities who are already required to review their Plans annually, consult on the revised versions and publish the approved Plan.

The written evidence submitted by Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) / Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) indicated that they were content with the existing reporting arrangements:

“The arrangements are suitable and specific, on the whole. The monitoring and reporting system ensures that plans are current and specific, encouraging every local authority to continually focus on them.”

The oral evidence on this point presented on 2 July appeared to relate specifically to the capacity of Carmarthenshire to produce a report. The Welsh Government is not aware that all local authorities share this view.

The Committee recommends:

R7: Welsh Government should publish information in relation to its role in the approval of WESPs, including details of its response to each Local Authority’s WESP and, where appropriate, the reasons why a WESP was referred back to a Local Authority for modification and actions taken by a Local Authority as a result.

### **Response: Reject**

The role of Welsh Ministers is clearly set out in the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013; to approve a plan, approve it with modifications or reject it and prepare another Plan which is to be treated as the authority’s approved plan. Where Ministers approve with modifications or reject they must consult the local authority. The associated administrative arrangements underlying the exercise of these functions are of limited, if any, public interest. Local authorities are required to consult in respect of a new or revised WESP prior to submitting it to Welsh Ministers for approval so that interested parties have an opportunity to make known their views on the draft.

As regards the second part of Recommendation 7, the publication of the Government response to a local authority and any subsequent correspondence, the Welsh Government is not persuaded that this is either necessary or appropriate on a routine basis. Since a local authority must publish its approved WESP, the extent of modifications (if any) will be evident as part of that process.

The Committee recommends:

R8: Welsh Government should be clearer with local authorities about its expectations in relation to the promotion of growth of Welsh-medium education so that all local authorities buy into the Welsh Government’s ambitions.

### **Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government believes that this recommendation can be achieved as part of its ongoing dialogue with local authorities. However, it is closely linked to Recommendations 9 and 10, the responses to which further elaborate on the Government’s position in respect of these interlinked issues.

**Financial Implications: None.** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R9: Before the next iteration of WESPs, Welsh Government should review the processes for assessing demand to ensure that they are more robust. Processes should include provision to consult with children and young people, in accordance with the UNCRC.

**Response: Accept in principle**

The Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and Assessing Demand for Welsh-medium Education (Wales) Regulations 2013 already enable Welsh Ministers to require a local authority, in certain prescribed circumstances, to carry out a Welsh-medium education assessment. These powers are available to Welsh Ministers from 2017.

The Regulations also set out the information to be included in such an assessment including the 6 core questions to be asked and the supporting information to accompany them. As a forerunner to the availability to Welsh Ministers of the function to require a local authority to conduct a Welsh-medium education assessment, the Government will update and publish the good practice guidance prepared by the former Welsh Language Board in 2009. This document will constitute guidance under section 87(4) of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 to which local authorities must have regard. Welsh Government will continually review the processes used by local authorities to measure demand, and will consider further enabling powers if necessary.

**Financial Implications: None.** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R10: Welsh Government should develop and publish a strategy relating to the promotion and awareness of Welsh-medium education at a national and local level. The strategy should include tools that can be used and adapted by local authorities and schools

**Response: Accept in principle**

The three-year marketing and communications campaign which was launched in November 2013 continues to raise awareness of Welsh-medium and bilingual education so that parents consider all options available to them. A number of elements have been undertaken including national and local media advertising and local events. Once the initial three-year period of implementation is over, Welsh Government will consider publishing a strategy for the next phase of activity.

To date, Welsh Government has worked with three local authority areas where demand for Welsh-medium education is currently low. The three areas targeted were Llanelli, Blaenau Gwent and Flintshire. Working with local schools and partners such as Twf, Mentrau Iaith and Mudiad Meithrin, information and advice was provided to parents about Welsh-medium and bilingual education.

In addition to the local campaigns we have also:

- promoted Welsh-medium education in Bookstart packages for over 10,000 parents
- developed the [llyw.cymru/cymraeg](http://llyw.cymru/cymraeg) website to showcase case studies, resources, advice and local Welsh-medium education events
- piloted a live social media conversation about Welsh-medium education with local authorities and partners in Flint
- launched the Cymraeg for Kids app at the National Eisteddfod to encourage parents to learn Welsh with their child
- encouraged partners, including Twf and Mudiad Meithrin to adopt the Cymraeg for Kids branding and guidelines
- collaborated with colleagues across the Welsh Government to ensure that consistent messages are being communicated in all its education campaigns, e.g. Education begins at home.

Social media activity via facebook/ChoiceDewis page and the [llyw.cymru/cymraeg](http://llyw.cymru/cymraeg) website has supported all campaigns and communications activity.

Over the coming year, Welsh Government will continue with the marketing and communications activity, and is already in the process of developing a booklet with information for parents on Welsh-medium education; resources for local authorities to tailor and use on their websites; and materials to support parents.

**Financial Implications: None.** Costs are drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R11: Welsh Government should work with Local Government and stakeholders to strengthen the role of fora so that they are more effective. Fora should be open, representative and should report annually

**Response: Accept in principle**

Although all local authorities have established a Welsh-medium education forum, there is no statutory requirement on them to do so. It follows, therefore, that Welsh Ministers are not in a position to prescribe the membership, constitution or *modus operandi* of a forum. However, as part of its ongoing relationship with local authorities the Welsh Government will take every opportunity of reminding them of our expectations in terms of the fora's contribution to the development and monitoring of WESPs.

**Financial Implications: None.**

The Committee recommends:

R12: Welsh Government should clarify the role of regional consortia in relation to WESPs

**Response: Accept in principle**

The statutory duty to prepare, submit and implement WESPs rests with local authorities. The Welsh Government is content for local consortia to play an active part in supporting local authorities to discharge these duties, and it already values the contribution the consortia have made to date, particularly in relation to those aspects of WESPs which focus on standards, Outcomes 3, 4 and 5. As the role of consortia, and their relationship with their constituent local authorities, continues to develop the Welsh Government would expect to see their role in relation to WESPs to develop accordingly. However, in the meantime the further detail of how local authorities and local consortia should develop this relationship in the context of WESPs is matter for them.

**Financial Implications: None.**

The Committee recommends:

R13: The Minister should use the powers available to him under existing legislation to intervene where local authorities are failing to deliver their WESPs

**Response: Accept**

Welsh Ministers have been, and continue to be, prepared to use their powers of intervention but only when it would be appropriate to do so. The powers of intervention are available where a local authority has failed to exercise their education functions, or has exercised them but has done so unreasonably. A missed target or a failure to deliver on a specific commitment may not, of itself, be a cause for intervention. Welsh Ministers would have to have regard to all the circumstances, including the competing pressures on local authorities' limited resources. There may be unforeseen circumstances such that a local authority may not be able to fulfil all its commitments. Any judgement about whether that is acceptable or justifiable must turn on a close examination of all the circumstances and whether a local authority can demonstrate that it has acted reasonably in those circumstances.

**Financial Implications: None.** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R14: Welsh Government should outline the reasons for the deficit between the percentage of Welsh-medium places available under Flying Start and its targets for 25% of seven year olds to be taught through the medium of Welsh

by 2015 (and 30% by 2020). Welsh Government should explain how it will address the deficit.

**Response: Reject**

Welsh-medium provision is an integral part of Flying Start and the Welsh Government has always placed a requirement on local authorities to respond to parental choice and to deliver Welsh-medium provision where required. The Welsh Government has not set any specific targets for the provision of Welsh-medium Flying Start childcare. However, the Flying Start strategic guidance continues to make it clear that local authorities must put in place arrangements to meet the preference of parents for Welsh-medium and/or bilingual provision. All local authorities must set out in their Flying Start plans the arrangements they have made in relation to the provision of Welsh-medium and/or bilingual childcare, where parents have expressed a preference. The Welsh Government encourages local authorities to ensure that arrangements are in place to meet the preference of parents for Welsh-medium and/or bilingual provision and to proactively offer Welsh language provision.

Flying Start is an early years programme of childcare for children aged 0 to under 4. At age 2 to 3 children are offered free part-time childcare. The Welsh-medium Education Strategy targets relate to pupils aged 7. They are, therefore, two separate issues. Increases in parental preference and resultant Welsh-medium Flying Start provision would not significantly affect the Welsh Government's ability to reach its target for 25% of 7 year olds to be educated through the medium of Welsh.

The Committee recommends:

R15: Welsh Government to outline how it intends to ensure that transport arrangements for Welsh-medium and bilingual education supports the delivery of WMES targets.

**Response: Accept in principle**

School transport arrangements are governed by statute. Under the Learner Transport (Wales) Measure 2008 a learner is entitled to free transport to a school, whether Welsh-medium, bilingual or English-medium, if that school is considered by the local authority to be the learner's nearest suitable school and the learner meets the distance criteria specific to their age. Primary pupils are entitled to free transport if they live 2 miles or further from the nearest suitable school whilst secondary pupils are entitled to free transport if they live 3 miles or further from the nearest suitable school. Where learners do not attend the nearest suitable school, local authorities may use their discretion to provide free transport to Welsh-medium schools regardless of the distance criteria in order to promote access to education and training through the medium of Welsh.

Free post-16 home to school transport is discretionary. Local authorities do not have to provide it free of charge.

Local authorities are asked to include in their WESPs a statement demonstrating how they “...fulfil the statutory duty under section 10 of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 to promote access to education and training through the medium of Welsh.” Authorities say that they comply with all aspects of the Measure i.e. they provide free home to school transport for those pupils of statutory school age who live outside the statutory distance – 2 miles for primary pupils and 3 miles for secondary pupils. Some also provide free transport on a discretionary basis for post-16 pupils. Local authorities have been reminded of the statutory duty under section 10.

The Welsh Government has already announced £5m for a 1/3 discounted travel scheme for 16, 17 and 18 years old attending training and or work in 2015-16.

Arrangements for home to school transport are set out in the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and the accompanying Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance (June 2014). The Welsh Government has no current plans to change the statutory position. WESPs cannot be used to change the statutory requirements by reducing the distance criteria or making discretionary post-16 transport compulsory.

#### **Financial Implications: None**

The Committee recommends:

R16: Welsh Government to outline how it will address Welsh-medium provision for pupils with additional learning needs and whether the forthcoming Additional Learning Needs Bill would be an appropriate vehicle for doing so.

#### **Response: Accept**

The Welsh Government recognises the importance of supporting those with special educational needs (SEN) within Welsh-medium education. However, it is the responsibility of local authorities to ensure there is suitable educational provision for all learners including those with SEN who receive their education through the medium of Welsh. Mechanisms already exist for local authorities to assess and set out their strategy for improving Welsh-medium education through the WESPs.

Following the conclusion of two critical studies to better understand the SEN skills needs of the teaching workforce; and assess the capacity of specialist support services, work is progressing to improve the support available to learners with SEN. Through our approach for the New Deal Pioneer Schools, we are ensuring our workforce will develop the knowledge and skills needed to better support all learners with SEN, including those within Welsh medium education. In addition we are working with key stakeholder to develop a national workforce planning system for SEN specialist support services to improve the capacity of services to support learners and schools across Wales. This workforce planning system will take into consideration the Welsh language capacity of specialist support services.

Welsh Government is aware that a number of respondents to our recent consultation on the draft Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Bill have suggested that the Bill should include specific reference to the availability of provision and services through the medium of Welsh. Indeed, the Children, Young People and Education Committee raised this very same issue during its pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Bill. These points will be considered as part of the general analysis of the consultation and a view taken in relation to them in due course. It would not be appropriate to pre-empt the outcome of that analysis by commenting at this point in time. Welsh Government will also want to consider what role the proposed Additional Learning Needs Code might play in this matter.

**Financial Implications: None.** Any additional costs will be drawn from existing budgets.

The Committee recommends:

R17: Welsh Government should reconsider its Welsh-medium education strategies with a view to ensuring that the importance of post-16 education is reflected in them and in turn within local authority WESPs.

### **Response: Reject**

The recommendation goes wider than Welsh in Education Strategic Plans and refers to “Welsh-medium education strategies”. The accompanying text (paragraph 1.43 of the Committee’s Report on page 52) suggests that the Committee may have meant to recommend that WESPs should be extended to cover further education provision. If that is the case, it would require a change to the legislation. The School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 places a duty on local authorities to draw up WESPs. Further education provision is delivered by colleges and institutions other than local authorities and which are not subject to the requirements of the Act.

Local authorities are already required to indicate in their WESPs how they propose to increase the percentage of learners aged 16 -19 who study subjects through the medium of Welsh in schools. Further education institutions are outside the scope of the WESPs (other than where local authorities work in partnership through 14 -19 learning pathways networks to provide collaborative courses in Key Stage 4 and in some cases post-16).

Across Wales the availability of Welsh-medium or bilingual courses for post-16 learners varies from one college to the next depending on the nature of the area it serves. A few colleges have developed a wide range of provision which is available bilingually whilst others have developed some courses and modules in priority areas such as Childcare, Health and Social Care, and Leisure and Tourism. Welsh Government has supported further education colleges with a three-year Bilingual Champion grant to put in place structures and practical support to tutors to develop Welsh-medium and bilingual modules and courses. The Welsh-medium Education Strategy’s annual reports demonstrate a gradual increase in the number of learning activities delivered through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in the further education colleges.

The availability of provision in further education institutions is monitored through the annual planning and funding process whereby colleges are required to indicate which of their courses are available through the medium of Welsh and/or bilingually. The take-up of the provision is monitored through a specific category in the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) which informs the annual reports of the WMES.