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Evaluation of the Implementation of the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children

Final Report

Evaluation of the Implementation of the Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children. Final report
A report for the Welsh Government

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Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
CSC	Central South Consortium Joint Education Service (Regional Education Consortium comprising of Bridgend County Borough Council, Cardiff Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and Vale of Glamorgan County Borough Council)
EAS	Education Achievement Service for South East Wales (Regional Education Consortium comprising of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Monmouthshire County Borough Council, Newport City Council, Torfaen County Borough Council)
EFSM	Eligible for free school meals
ERW	Ein Rhanbarth ar Waith/ Education through Regional Working (Regional Education Consortium comprising of Carmarthenshire County Council, Ceredigion County Council, Neath and Port Talbot County Borough Council, Pembrokeshire County Council, Powys County Council, City and County of Swansea
GwE	School Effectiveness and Improvement Service for North Wales (Regional Education Consortium comprising of Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Gwynedd Council, Isle of Anglesey County Council, Wrexham County Borough Council)
LA	Local Authority
LACE Coordinator	Looked after Children in Education Coordinator
REC	Regional Education Consortium
PDG LAC	Pupil Development Grant for Looked After Children
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
TA	Teaching Assistant
VfM	Value for Money
VSH	Virtual School Headteacher

Executive Summary

ICF Consulting, Arad Research and Cardiff University were commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2017 to undertake an evaluation of the implementation of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) for Looked After Children (LAC) over the years 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Background

The Pupil Development Grant[1] was introduced in 2012 to provide additional funding to schools to help mitigate disadvantages for pupils on free school meals and LAC. In 2015, it was decided to separate the funding provided for children eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and LAC through two separate grants. Allocations for the PDG for LAC were made to the four regional education consortia (RECs)[2], rather than directly to schools[3], with the aim of facilitating a more strategic approach to using the funding across regions. The allocation amounts to a little under £4 million a year.

The grant is expected to support school improvement to reduce inequities facing LAC:

- There are around 6,000 LAC with considerable variation in the numbers between LAs and schools. LAC's prior experiences and their experience of being in care can have profound effects on their educational progress and attainment which impact on their vocational training and employment prospects.

- While the trend over time shows LAC's attendance and attainment (up to 2016) has generally improved, there is a large gap in attainment between LAC and other pupils at all stages of education, critically at Key Stage 4 which has a great effect on progression. This is found to varying degrees in all REC areas.

Aims

The study evaluates the implementation and management of the PDG for LAC after the April 2015 changes to its allocation and management, including how:

- Policies were developed on allocating and using funding effectively;

- Decisions were, and are, made on funding allocations;

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[1] Previously called the Pupil Deprivation Grant and renamed in March 2017

[2] These are: CSC for Central South Wales, EAS for South East Wales, ERW for South West/Mid- Wales, and GWE for North Wales.

[3] As is the case for the PDG.

- Funding is used by RECs;

- Partners are involved in these processes;

- Funding allocated is monitored against expected outcomes; and

- Funding is affecting the attainment/wellbeing of LAC.

This report also provides recommendations on ways to improve the management and administration of the PDG: policy recommendations (to inform Welsh Government guidance and advice to RECs and stakeholders) and practice recommendations (on the administration and allocation of the grant by RECs, LAs and schools) to maximise the effectiveness of the grant, as well as the identification of approaches that achieve positive outcomes for LAC.

Method

Between December 2017 and March 2018, five main research activities were carried out: interviews, an e-survey, case studies, a literature review and secondary data collection, as outlined in the diagram below.

This had some limitations to address the aims and objectives of the evaluation. To consider how the grant was used, on what activities and with what results, RECs and LAs were expected to provide monitoring and evaluation data as well as documentary information on what allocations were made and what expenditure was incurred on grant-funded activities. This information was not generally provided, and where it was provided, it was often of poor quality. As a result, it was not possible to systematically relate RECs' grant allocations to their spend on specific activities and the outputs and outcomes expected of them. In the absence of data, in many instances evidence of budgetary allocations was used instead of actual expenditure, and from qualitative interviews and case study participants describing activities and their perceived outcomes. Figures reported in the report should therefore be viewed as estimations and interpreted with caution.

In addition:

- Interview findings were limited by the incomplete knowledge of post-holders. In several RECs and LAs, changes in post-holder over the evaluation period led to gaps in stakeholder knowledge and/or the reporting of contradictory information by different stakeholders. In part this was overcome where previous post-holders could be interviewed;

- While a total of 235 responses was received from the school survey (covering approximately 15 per cent of schools) this was not sufficient for making detailed comparisons between RECs.

Overview of research

Interviews

REC leads and LACE coordinators
Four REC leads, 22 LACE coordinators and other relevant post-holders (33 interviews in total)

Stakeholders
Six interviews with seven stakeholders from organisations representing LAC, foster children and adopted children; two interviews with foster carers

LAC
Two group discussions with 14 care experienced young people

E-survey
Survey (Welsh and English) distributed to LAC leads and governors in all LAs to gather school-level views on the PDG LAC (235 responses)

Case studies
12 REC, LA and school-level case studies focussing on the most commonly funded activities. An average of 5-7 stakeholders were spoken to per study.

Data

RECs and LAs
Analysis of data collected by RECs and LAs on grant planning and allocation, spend and outcomes.

National
Analysis of national data concerning the educational attainment of LAC available from Stats Wales.

Best practice literature
Collation and analysis of secondary literature on effective use of the grant.

To assess the evidence, an evaluation framework structured the research objectives around the components of administering the PDG: governance, policy setting, allocation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Research evidence on activities to help LAC's education

Despite a relatively small body of robust evidence of effect, the review identified the following activities as potentially having a positive impact on LAC:

- Interventions that are co-produced with children and young people and consider the broader context and needs of LAC.

- Strategic tools: Establishing robust monitoring systems and tools and clear evaluation procedures that LA and school staff are trained to use. Systems should include clear outcomes measures that focus on capturing wider holistic needs.

- Training activities: Providing training to school staff on the social and emotional needs of LAC and how to meet them; and providing training to foster carers to help them better support children's educational needs at home.

- Capacity building: Building capacity through the wider system through training and providing support to designated teachers, social workers and foster carers.

- Specific support: The strongest evidence base of evaluations with rigorous designs suggests that individual and small group tutoring interventions can be effective in improving the academic skills of LAC. Material resources can be effective but only when combined with the provision of trained support to foster parents or tutors to ensure that young people use resources constructively.

The review also suggests the following ways to effectively manage and deliver grant funding:

- Recruiting a Virtual School Head (VSH) or having a similarly designated member of staff at LA level who is a senior, experienced educational professional and whose sole remit is to support LAC through strategic planning, clear monitoring and evaluation and networking with wider stakeholders.

- Ensuring a small but well focused and strategic team at LA level that facilitates capacity-building across schools, social work teams and wider stakeholder groups.

- Ensuring each school has a member of the senior management team responsible for delivering the school's LAC strategy, and a designated governor with a strong understanding of the needs of LAC.

Findings from the study

Governance

The Welsh Government requires every REC, LA and school to have a designated person responsible for LAC who is in charge of coordinating, delivering and monitoring grant spending and supporting networking and best practice sharing. In practice, large variations in the quantity and continuity of REC, LA and school level resourcing were identified. These variations may have affected the quality, consistency and content of work at each level.

At national level, Welsh Government communications on changes to the grant, grant allocations, priorities and expected use of the grant were often provided after the beginning of the financial year which affected grant planning and spending. However, most stakeholders were aware of Welsh Government guidance on the use of the PDG LAC or wider PDG, particularly the more recent guidance documents, and the majority found them useful.

Wider stakeholder organisations representing LAC and other vulnerable young people reported a general awareness of the grant changes, however some had not been consulted on changes and none had a clear idea of how the money was spent. Some also called for more systematic involvement of LAC in planning and governance processes.

Welsh Government guidance requires RECs, LAs and schools to communicate regularly with wider stakeholders and develop collaborative working arrangements. However, regional governance arrangements varied considerably between RECs: some RECs had formal steering groups while others relied on more ad-hoc, informal consultations with stakeholders. There were mixed levels of engagement of Looked after Children Education (LACE) coordinators in regional planning processes and mixed awareness of regional activities/plans within LAs and schools. No formal communication mechanisms were identified for the sharing of information between RECs and LAs however regular information sharing was identified between LACE coordinators in most regions (for example, through LACE coordinator steering groups or more informally).

Schools were generally not involved in REC and LA planning processes and when money was held at LA level, there was limited evidence of schools being involved in LA level processes to allocate the grant funding received. In 2016/17, more school

level decisions were made through cluster level collaboration or with LA or REC level stakeholders than in 2015/16. Schools reported varied levels of awareness of grant changes and of regional and local plans. Various dissemination methods were identified, although most schools were informed via local rather than regional channels. School respondents reported relatively good awareness of training opportunities but limited awareness of other REC and LA level PDG LAC spend. Awareness of how to access grant funding improved between 2015/16 and 2016/17.

Examples of effective best practice sharing structures/mechanisms were identified, but these were often at LA to LA level (for example through LACE coordinator steering groups) rather than facilitated by RECs. Most best practice sharing appeared to be largely informal or ad-hoc.

Policy setting

REC and LA staff and national stakeholder groups generally understood the national aims and objectives of the grant set out by the Welsh Government and agreed with national level priorities, identifying grant changes and objectives as necessary and timely. Given overall agreement of priorities, REC leads would like to move to a national model for priority and target setting. However, LA staff and national stakeholder groups often suggested that the Welsh Government could better clarify that the introduction of the PDG LAC and the requirement for funding to be held at regional level was a national policy decision; provide clearer guidance on the types of activity that can be funded and which young people are covered by the funding; clarify whether wider wellbeing outcomes should be considered alongside educational attainment; and provide greater clarity on how children who move in or out of Wales should be supported by the grant.

Regional and local level priorities and plans were generally aligned, however, some differences were identified in the types of planned activities, particularly at LA level. Where slight variations existed, LAs felt that they were necessary to address the specific needs of their population. Alignment of REC level priorities and cluster priorities were less clear; most interviewees commenting on cluster arrangements reported large variations in the content and quality of cluster bids.

All four RECs reported updating plans after assessing spend, reviewing and discussing priorities in line with Welsh Government policy, and in some cases, on the basis of the wider evidence base, best practice findings and evaluation results.

However, there was limited evidence of any systematic revision processes. At LA level, three LAs reported updating plans on the basis of monitoring and evaluation of spend. Survey respondents in schools felt that regional plans generally took into account the Welsh Government's guidance and current research and/or best practice, however this was less the case for local plans.

Allocation

In relation to funding delegations:

- The levels (REC, LA, school) to which RECs delegated grant funding for decisions about allocations varied across RECs and between years. All RECs retained some funding for LAs (in 2015/16), and two retained some funding for LAs in 2016/17 (not EAS or CSC). All RECs provided funding to schools (or clusters); some directly (GwE in both years, CSC and EAS in 2016/17), and some through LA funding (CSC and EAS 2015/16, GwE and ERW), although funding proportions varied by REC.

- Variations in approach to determining funding allocations were identified: instead of using social services data to determine allocation totals for LAs or school clusters, three RECs used PLASC data. While all RECs used a formula approach to funding allocations to LAs; bidding was more commonly used for school allocations at REC or LA level.

- Between 2 and 12 per cent of total regional funding was held at REC level; RECs generally held a greater percentage of funding at regional level in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. All RECs held some money to fund REC leadership and management and regional level training on attachment issues and behaviour change. A very small proportion of funding was also used for networking and best practice sharing activities in CSC, ERW and GwE and for supporting improved monitoring and evaluation.

- At LA level, little funding was used for improving monitoring and evaluation systems and processes; almost all LAs reported using funding to deliver LA level training; over half funded LA level support staff; just under half of LAs across all RECs reported using funding for best practice sharing activities; and almost all reported providing direct support to LAC. ERW was the only REC to consistently fund additional support staff at LA level in all LAs.

- Less information was available on the activities funded through cluster or school bids but there is evidence of funding for school/cluster training, staff recruitment, individual support for LAC/specific interventions for LAC and whole school strategies that disproportionally support LAC. Little funding appears to have been allocated to monitoring and evaluation projects and networking and best practice sharing.

And for funding processes:

- Late disbursement of funding affected REC, LA and school staff's ability to plan, deliver and evaluate activities. School survey respondents also highlighted limited support with bid applications and increased administrative burden resulting from cluster bidding processes.

- The majority of allocations appear to be in line with grant requirements. At REC level, LA and school-level, these are largely in line with general REC-level guidance and priorities. It is more difficult to assess the alignment of school bursary funding and cluster bids with REC level priorities given the lack of clear spending and monitoring information available.

- There is some evidence that REC and LA staff drew on evidence of need to inform funding allocations and that for cluster bids RECs or LAs generally required schools to submit funding requests that provided some information on identified needs. Tuition, attachment training and support staff were funded by the grant which aligns with best practice. However, there was limited evidence of funding for other best practice activities.

- There is some evidence that funding decisions at REC and LA level were based on evidence of what works and were funded in line with best practice but no systematic approach to identifying what works and feeding it into decision-making processes was identified.

- At school level, over half of respondents who received grant funding made school-level funding decisions on the basis of individual needs of LAC in the school but fewer respondents said they made decisions on the basis of a school-level needs assessment (just over half) and only a fifth reported making evidence-based decisions.

- Allocations often lacked costings and budgets. While total allocations by RECs and LA have been reported, not all provide clear breakdowns of planned spend by activity type.

- In general, there was largely qualitative reporting in REC support plans with no standardised approach to reporting planned spend across LAs and limited/unclear reporting of actual spend at REC and LA level which made comparisons of planned and actual allocations difficult.

- Where planned and actual spend could be compared some LAs had large under or over-spends in one or both funding years.

- The content and quality of REC level plans were mixed. While some reported expected outputs, outcomes and targets, sometimes broken down by activity, in general the quality and clarity of target setting and the specificity/measurability of selected outcomes was poor.

Monitoring and evaluation

All RECs have systems in place to track spending allocations to some extent. However, systems are of varying form and quality which means there are no standardised reporting formats and metrics. Similar variations in monitoring and evaluation methods were identified at LA level, with some LAs reporting little to no monitoring of spend or outcomes. At school level, schools were not consistently monitoring outcomes resulting from spend.

Not all LA and school staff responsible for spending grant allocations were clear about their role in monitoring the expenditure and the outcomes achieved. This is partly because of the differing funding allocation/disbursement processes, governance structures and levels of resourcing across LAs and RECs and partly because of the lack of clear guidance on the accountability for delegated funds. REC and LA level interviewees felt that schools were more accountable for their spending compared to pre-2015 when money was allocated directly to schools. However, they and national stakeholders were all aware that monitoring and evaluation systems were still generally poor and required improvements.

Given the relatively poor quality of monitoring and evaluation systems in place, there is very limited evidence of measured impact of the grant. There was generally a consensus that:

- The new funding arrangements have increased the profile of LAC's educational support and meant that funding is better targeting LAC;

- The strategic funding has facilitated the sustainable upskilling of staff, strengthened capacity across schools, and improved links between stakeholders including schools, LAs, social services and foster carers;

- REC and LA level training has improved stakeholders' awareness of the needs of LAC and, in many cases, improved their ability to support LAC in the classroom. Internal evaluation findings in ERW also linked attachment training to improvements in GCSE results and improved attendance and exclusion rates.

- Additional support staff had supported capacity-building within schools and improved educational and wellbeing outcomes for individual LAC, such as reduced exclusions, increased attainment and improved wellbeing.

At regional level, training was identified as a particularly effective use of funding; at LA level staff recruitment, training and flexible bursary support were viewed as most effective; and at school level, survey respondents identified specific interventions for LAC, schools training and recruitment of school support staff as having the greatest impact.

Conclusions

How well is the system introduced in 2015 functioning?

The aims of the new funding system introduced in 2015 were to improve the strategic approach to funding decisions; reduce bureaucracy and administration; and expand the range of grant beneficiaries. In order to achieve these objectives, the Welsh Government expected RECs to work collaboratively with LAs, schools and other partners to develop effective interventions for improving the educational outcomes of LAC. Any delegation of funding to LAs or schools was expected to be exceptional and only where plans would be consistent with a regional approach.

This study has identified that not all the Government's expectations have been met. It has found that RECs have set strategic objectives and implemented a revised allocation process which has used some of the grant for strategic sustainable activities, such as building the capacity of teachers through training, and a large portion of the grant for supporting groups of LAC in LAs and school clusters which is responsive to their individual needs.

However, it has also found that the strategic approaches have delegated large amounts of the grant to either or both LAs and schools, that collaborative working has not been well-established in all areas, and that the use of the grant on effective interventions could be better evidenced. While there are similarities in REC's strategies and priorities which reflect the needs of LAC, there is no effective system being implemented in any of the RECs to plan, allocate and ensure accountability for the grant where it is delegated. This is particularly so where funding has been delegated to school clusters. Large variations in grant governance and resourcing arrangements can be found, as well as variations in the funding allocation processes used in each REC, across LAs within the same REC and across funding years.

Variations at REC, LA and school level in the way grant spending and outcomes are accounted for and gaps in the data on actual spending have made it difficult to assess how the grant was spent in 2015/16 and 2016/17 and what activities have contributed to any benefits for LAC.

What are the reasons for this situation?

The following factors can be identified from the research as possible reasons for the shortcomings outlined above:

- **Availability of staff to lead and coordinate:** differences in the quality and continuity of leadership at REC and LA level have affected the strength of governance arrangements, financial systems and communication systems and therefore the extent to which priorities and activities are well developed, understood and aligned at each level. Resourcing variations and discontinuities in posts being filled are also likely to have affected the ability to monitor and evaluate spending and outcomes from the grant.

- **The quality of working relations and collaboration between budget holders and grantees (WG and RECs, RECs and LAs and RECs/LAs and schools):** governance and communications by RECs and LAs have not always systematically engaged all key stakeholders, such as LACE coordinators and other representatives of LAC. This has affected the level of awareness and understanding of the grant; the alignment of priorities and the types of funded activities in some cases; the establishment of outputs and outcomes for monitoring grant activities; and the extent to which staff responsible for funded activities understand monitoring and evaluation requirements

- **Limited understanding of what works:** while there is some evidence of RECs and LAs basing funding decisions on what they understand to work to help to increase the educational attainment for LAC, this is more often based on other practitioners' views of best practice than research evidence and learning networks. This may be affected by evidence of best practice to support the educational attainment of LAC being in various guidance documents, the research evidence not generally being strong, and ad-hoc processes in place to identify and share best practice across RECs and LAs.

- **Inconsistent systems for grant disbursement:** varied funding disbursement structures have affected: the consistency and alignment of funded activities across RECs and LAs; the level of engagement of different stakeholders in planning, grant allocation and review of spend and impact; the ability to adequately assess need and select effective interventions; and the quality of monitoring and evaluation of spend and outcomes. These have also led to different levels of grant administration/bureaucracy at REC, LA and school level and differing levels of grant coverage (for example, not all school clusters bid for funding).

- **Poor systems for monitoring and reviewing grant allocations:** inadequate and absent systems for monitoring and evaluating grant spending has affected the extent to which the use and impact of the grant can be assessed. It has also affected the extent to which spending plans and priorities can be updated on the basis of what works and monitored to prevent over or under-spends from occurring.

What would improve the grant process and the effective use of the grant?

The following could address most of the shortcomings identified above:

- **Availability of staff to lead and coordinate:** each REC should ensure a full-time REC lead is in place to undertake governance, communication and monitoring activities needed. At LA level, a full-time LACE coordinator should be in place as expected in all LAs and supported by other staff (dependent on the number of LAC in each LA and their support needs) in line with Welsh Government guidance to ensure LAC's education and attainment is a key focus

of support[4]. At school level, a designated LAC lead should be present in all schools.

- **Better working arrangements between budget holders and grantees (WG and RECs, RECs and LAs/representatives of LAC and RECs/LAs and schools):** clearer and more timely guidance on grant priorities, allocations and use is required from the Welsh Government although RECs have authority to make preparations each year ahead of exact allocations given the Government's stated commitment to the PDG LAC. All RECs should have formal and consistent arrangements for engaging LACE coordinators, representatives of schools and other practitioners working with LAC and wider stakeholder groups (including LAC and foster carers) in planning and monitoring processes and communications about the grant and throughout the financial year.

- **Increasing understanding of what works and the needs of LAC:** at national level, the existing evidence of the most effective activities to improve the educational attainment of LAC needs to be in one place and updated on a regular basis and they key findings/best practice for LA and school staff communicated in a simplified form. There is also a need for stronger monitoring and evaluation processes particularly for RECs and LAs and a more systematic approach to engaging key school staff in learning about good practice.

- **Systems for managing grant allocations (decisions, implementation):** given the general alignment of grant priorities across regions, a national model for priority and target setting could be introduced with all RECs expected to follow a similar disbursement and accounting process with grants allocated on condition of a resources delivery plan and agreed outputs and outcomes. This system should be supported by a standard system for monitoring and reviewing grant allocations. This should clarify roles and responsibilities, outcome measures (including LAC's wellbeing and attendance at school), and standard reporting with a simple focus on spending allocations, actual expenditure and outputs/outcomes reported against pre-defined activity categories to provide high level information for accountability, monitoring and review.

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[4] Making a Difference, November 2017, pp7-9

- **Systems of accountability**: RECs and LAs need to be more clearly accountable for how the grant and the exercise of corporate parenting roles is having a positive effect on the education of LAC. The Government could consider regional targets and annual reports on progress setting out the contribution of the grant towards the improvements achieved.

Recommendations

Welsh Government (policy and practice)

The Welsh Government should:

- Release communications regarding grant changes, yearly priorities and funding totals to RECs before the start of the financial year.

- Develop a single, easy to read guidance document specifically for the PDG LAC to replace the Frequently Asked Questions guidance currently in existence. The guidance should be aimed at REC, LA and school level stakeholders and should include:

    o resourcing requirements for administering the grant at REC, LA and school level;

    o guidance on expected governance, collaboration and consultation, disbursement and accountability which reflects the agreed national model;

    o clarification on how LAs should support individuals who move away from the LA and on which pupils are covered by the funding (i.e. clearer definitions of beneficiary groups);

    o clarification of the expected outcomes of the grant in relation to the education of LAC: while educational outcomes are a key focus, the guidance should make clear that wider wellbeing outcomes and attendance are also in scope; and

    o a clear statement on what the grant can be spent on and the most appropriate level for delivery which will be understood by RECs, LAs and schools.

- Draw together the evidence of what activities work in one place and keep this up to date. This guidance could be a standalone document or be included as an annex in the PDG LAC guidance document.

- Implement a national model for grant planning, implementation and evaluation to be reflected in the Guidance and in the grant terms and conditions as appropriate, to include:

    o Priority and target setting which should be undertaken at national level through the development of strong governance arrangements to involve REC and LA level stakeholders;

    o A proportion of the funding that should be retained at REC level for the REC lead post and activities that support regional leadership, learning and collaboration - ongoing training for teachers and foster carers, monitoring and evaluation, networking and best practice sharing activities;

    o Monitoring and evaluation guidance with clear information regarding who is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of spend and outcomes at each level (REC, LA and school) and on how monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken by different stakeholders (i.e. the types of evaluation methodologies to use for different activities). It should also include a set of standardised output and outcome measures that must be used by all RECs and LAs for reporting impact;

    o A standardised spreadsheet/report structure for RECs to provide accountability for the grant spent and information which can be easily collated to show what activities and to what ends (outputs and outcomes) the grant has been spent. RECs in turn will be able to use it to regularly track actual spend against planned spend, and capture outcomes measured for each activity type against standard indicators.

- Require RECs to report annually on their area's progress towards regional targets on improving the educational attainment of LAC with evidence of the contribution which the grant has made to this.

REC-level practitioners (practice)

RECs should:

- Ensure they are making plans for future years well before the end of the previous financial year and not waiting for exact allocations and grant letters to be issued.

- Ensure the existence of strong and consistent governance arrangements at REC level to facilitate decision making; accountability; and networking, information and

best practice sharing with LACE coordinators and representatives of schools throughout the financial year. These arrangements should include consultation with foster carers and LAC.

- Ensure systematic communication strategies are in place to inform LACE coordinators, school staff and wider stakeholders of regional plans, REC level provision, and processes for accessing funding which is delegated or open for bids.

- Provide support to schools for cluster bids if these are given allocations, ensure cluster agreement to delivery and improve the efficiency of bid processes.

- Adopt the proposed national model and meet reporting arrangements to account for the added value of the grant in future years.

LAs and schools (practice)

LAs should:

- Ensure they have a designated LACE coordinator whose role reflects the responsibilities set out in Welsh Government guidance.

- Ensure alignment of LACE coordinator staff/teams with other relevant teams within the LA to ensure close working arrangements.

- Participate in Welsh Government and REC level governance arrangements for the grant and support the REC lead to develop and deliver regional activities funded by the grant.

- Ensure any LA level activities funded by the grant are sustainable and can be delivered to meet agreed outputs and outcomes.

- Regularly assess need within the LA through close work with LAC and previously LAC, and regular collaboration with school staff, foster carers and social workers.

- Comply with reporting arrangements to account for the use of the grant and its added value where funding is delegated.

Schools/school clusters should:

- Ensure they have a designated LAC lead in schools who is a member of the senior management team responsible for delivering the school's LAC strategy, and a designated governor with a strong understanding of the needs of LAC.

- Improve their networking and engagement with foster carers to ensure awareness and engagement in grant funding e.g. encouraging teachers to discuss PDG LAC spending with carers during parents' evenings and ensuring LAC leads in schools are monitoring and encouraging foster carer engagement.

- Comply with reporting arrangements to account for the use of the grant and its added value where funding is delegated.

- Ensure any school level activities funded by the grant are sustainable and can be delivered to meet agreed outputs and outcomes.

1. Introduction

1.1 ICF Consulting, Arad Research and Cardiff University were commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2017 to undertake an evaluation of the implementation of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) for Looked After Children (LAC) over the years 2015/16 and 2016/17[5]. This report summarises the full programme of work undertaken and presents the findings of the evaluation.

Background

1.2 Local authorities are required to promote educational achievement as an integral part of their duty to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the children they look after[6]. According to the Children Act 1989, a child is defined as looked-after by a local authority (LA) if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a LA's children's services department has cared for a child for more than 24 hours. By 2018, the Welsh Government expects 75 per cent of care leavers to be in education, employment or training by 2018, when they reach the age of 19[7]. However, there remains a gap in the educational outcomes of children that are looked after at every key stage in Wales, and they continue to have low rates of progression to post-16 education, training and meaningful employment[8]. A range of barriers can prevent them reaching their academic potential, such as unstable foster placements, school moves and inconsistent relationships with family, carers and professionals[9].

1.3 The Pupil Development Grant[10] was introduced in 2012 to provide additional funding to schools to help mitigate disadvantages for pupils on free school meals and LAC. The first evaluation of the PDG reported that where money for LAC was allocated directly to schools this sometimes resulted in resources being poorly targeted and not delivering effective outcomes[11]. A second year evaluation report found that only a few schools reported that LA advisors played a role in challenging or endorsing spending

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[5] Where illustrative, the report also comments on 2017-18 plans and activities and makes comparisons between years where relevant.

[6] Under the Code of Practice for Part 5 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

[7] Welsh Government, 2016. *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: Strategy*.

[8] Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., et al., 2015. *Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales*.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Previously called the Pupil Deprivation Grant and renamed in March 2017

[11] Pye, J., Hardy, C. and Taylor, C. (2014) *Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: first year evaluation report, Social Research Number 90/2014*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

and targeting. It recommended a more systematic approach to collaboration and sharing best practice, with greater involvement from Regional Education Consortia (RECs) to ensure the aims of the PDG are met in schools' use of the grant[12]. In 2015, it was decided to separate the funding provided for children eligible for free school meals (eFSM) and LAC through two separate grants. Furthermore, allocations for the PDG for LAC would be made to the four RECs[13], rather than directly to schools, with the aim of facilitating a more strategic approach to using the funding across regions. The allocation amounts to a little under £4 million a year.

1.4   To improve outcomes for LAC, the Welsh Government also set out a three year action plan in 2015/16. This included actions to support changes to the grant allocation process. With the three year plan coming to an end, the Welsh Government reported that implementation of the PDG for LAC has not developed in a consistent fashion and the pace of change varies between RECs and across REC areas[14]; while Estyn identified that RECs should improve planning and prioritising the use of the grant taking account of the complex needs of LAC[15].

Aims and objectives of the study

1.5   The aim of the study is to evaluate the implementation and management of the PDG for LAC since the April 2015 changes to its allocation and management, including how:

- Policies were developed on allocating and using funding effectively;

- Decisions were, and are, made on funding allocations;

- Funding is used by RECs;

- Partners are involved in these processes;

- Funding allocated is monitored against expected outcomes; and

- Funding is affecting the attainment/wellbeing of LAC.

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[12] Ibid

[13] These are: CSC for Central South Wales, EAS for South East Wales, ERW for South West/Mid- Wales, and GWE for North Wales.

[14] Letter written by Steve Davies, Director of the Education Directorate.

[15] Estyn, 2016. *Best practice report on raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after- a best practice report*.

1.6　　The following research questions were identified by the Welsh Government as key to addressing the requirements of this evaluation:

- What are the administrative processes in place in each of the REC areas and what roles are played by REC, LA and school staff in all stages of the process?

- What criteria are applied to deciding what to spend the grant on?

- What sources of evidence are used to determine how the grant is spent? Have resources, such as the community of practice[16], been used?

- What is the grant spent on? Do stakeholders agree these should have positive benefits and are critical for the education of LAC?

- What monitoring data is collected on the use of the grant and how is it used? Does this reflect the purposes for which it is allocated? Is this in line with the Welsh Government's guidance?

- What are the outcomes of the activities funded by the grant? Have they improved classroom practice? Have they affected LAC's academic performance?

- What monitoring data is collected on the education of LAC? Can any effect of the grant on their education be discerned?

- What are school staff's views on the activities funded and their value to LAC? How far are they aware of the funding?

- How could the grant process and the uses of the grant be improved?

1.7　　The study was commissioned to provide, on the basis of evaluation findings, a set of recommendations on ways to improve the management and administration of the PDG. This includes policy recommendations (to inform Welsh Government guidance and advice to RECs and stakeholders) and practice recommendations (on the administration and allocation of the grant by RECs, LAs and schools) to maximise the effectiveness of the grant, as well as the identification of approaches that achieve positive outcomes for LAC.

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[16] This is an online resource for practitioners and foster carers

1.8   This report may also assist the National Assembly for Wales Public Accounts
       Committee inquiry on Care Experienced Children and Young People which is
       considering the arrangements for and value for money of the PDG for LAC as part of
       its remit over the period 2017-21.

   Method overview

1.9   The evaluation consisted of three main stages, as outlined below. It took a mixed-
       methods approach, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered
       from a variety of sources.

Figure 1.1: Overview of evaluation methodology
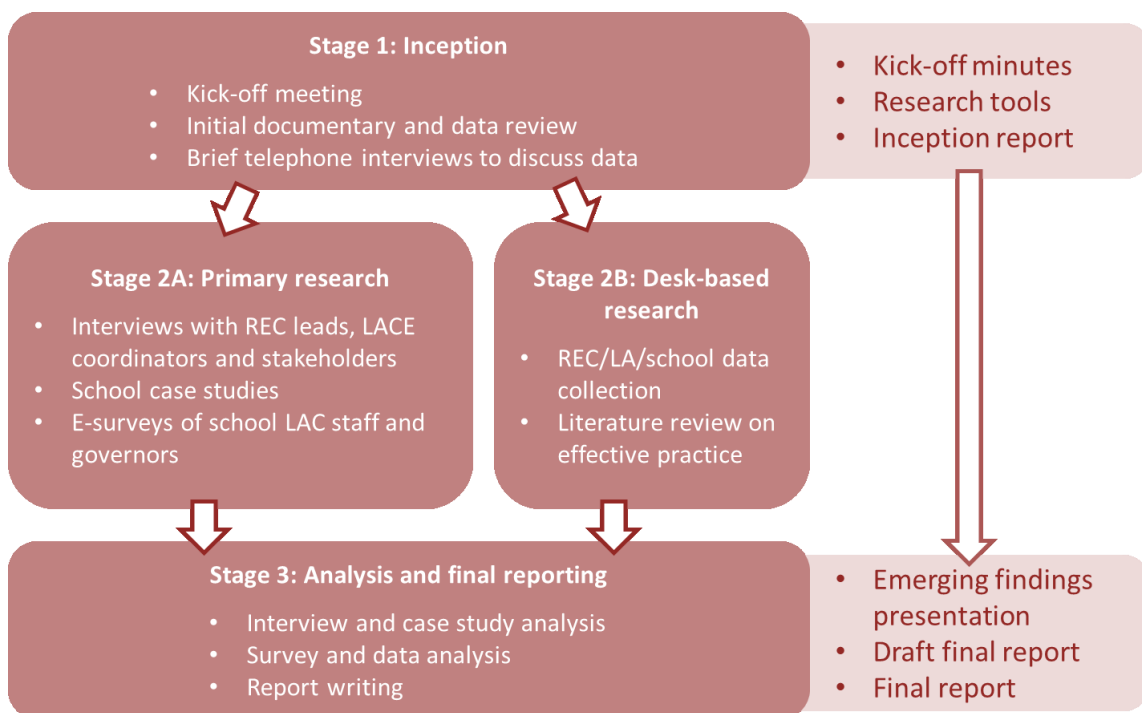
1.10   The primary research took place between December 2017 and March 2018 and
       consisted of four main research methods: interviews, an e-survey, case studies and
       secondary data collection, as outlined in 0 below.

Figure 1.2: Overview of research
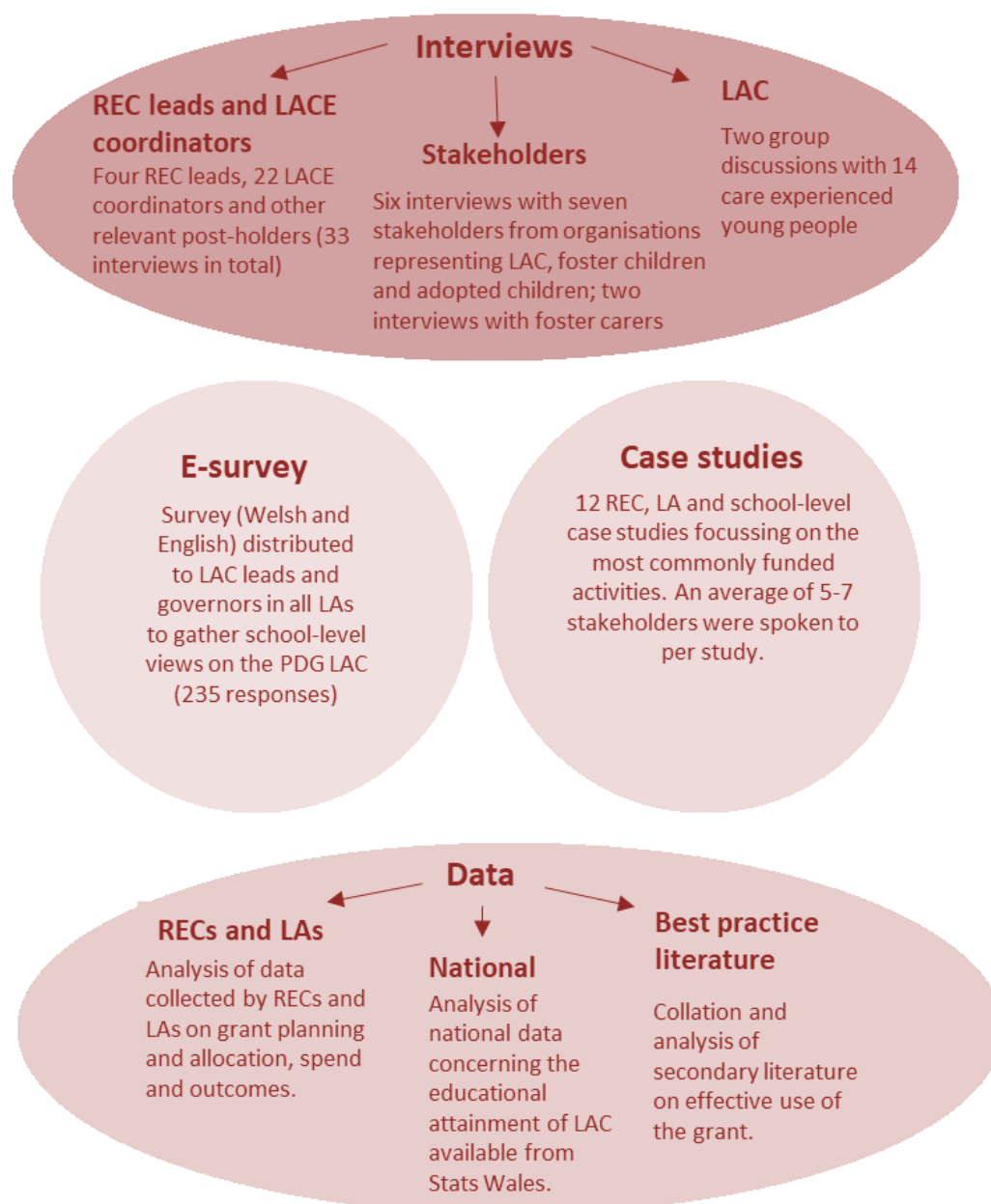
1.11   Further details of these activities are as follows:

- **Interviews:** all interviews followed semi-structured topic guides and were conducted in English or Welsh. Consultations with care experienced young people took place within an all-day event hosted by the Fostering Network and the Reaching Wider Team based at Swansea University. These consultations were led by two researchers and the young people taking part worked through a number of interactive activities using pictures and posters, either individually, with assistance or collaboratively in small groups. Notes were taken by researchers to supplement the pictures and posters.

- **E-survey:** the survey, was piloted for one week in early February 2018, with one LA. A few small changes were made to question length and phrasing on the basis of response rates and written feedback from 13 respondents. The final survey, consisting of 36 questions (34 closed response and two open text), was then translated into Welsh, and both links were distributed to participants. The survey was open for three and a half weeks, between 21 February and 18 March. Survey links were distributed by LACE coordinators and/or directly to school staff where contact details were provided.

- **Case studies:** focused on a sample of grant-funded activities across all four RECs. These activities included the recruitment of support staff, training for school staff, developing monitoring and evaluation systems and projects to share learning and best practice. Case study interviews or focus groups followed a semi-structured topic guide and between two and 17 interviews were carried out per case study (79 interviewees in total). Interviewees included staff involved in design and/or implementation, delivery staff and project beneficiaries including LAC where relevant and possible.

- **Literature review:** the literature review built on the study by Mannay et al. (2015)[17] to identify the most effective approaches to improving the educational outcomes of LAC. A long-list of 60 peer-reviewed and grey literature publications were identified by members of the research team from Cardiff University. After an initial review, 34 papers and reports were selected to be reviewed in detail. Following this more detailed examination, additional relevant studies was identified and reviewed to address gaps identified. As a result, a total of 40 studies have been considered in the final review[18]. A full list of references can be found in Annex A.

- **Secondary data:** the documentary evidence listed in Table 1.1: was provided by RECs. In addition, other miscellaneous documents were provided by two RECs including: 12 individual evaluation reports for schools in CSC; a regional strategy to reduce the impact of poverty on educational achievement; a report from a school relating to their use of PDG LAC funding; and a spreadsheet providing a breakdown of funding provided to schools in EAS in 2016/17. At LA level, 15 LAs

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[17] Mannay, D., et al op.cit.

[18] Material published since 2010 was the primary focus of the review. However, some key papers and reports preceding this timeframe were included where relevant.

provided evidence of planned spend (4), actual spend (5) or planned versus actual spend (6) for 2015/16 and 15 provided evidence for 2016/17 (3 planned spend, 6 actual spend and 6 planned versus actual spend). Other documentary evidence at LA level included: LA level plans (one LA), evaluations of LA training interventions (two LAs); audit forms (two LAs), bursary application forms (one LA), anonymised case studies or evaluations of supportive interventions for individual pupils or schools (three LAs); claims/update reports for ERW LAs; and end of year evaluation reports (three LAs). To clarify data on actual spend, RECs and LAs were also asked to complete spending breakdown templates including standardised categories of spend. Three RECs (CSC, ERW and EAS) and nine LAs[19] returned completed spreadsheets.

Table 1.1: Documentary material provided for each REC by financial year

Financial Year	Document Type	Region			
		ERW	CSC	GwE	EAS
2015 - 2016	Support Plan	X	X	X	X
	Grant Offer	X	X	X	X
	Regional Plan			X	X
	Regional Budget/Spending Plan		X		
	Regional Claim Report First Claim Q1	X			
	Regional Claim Report Second Claim Q2	X			
	Highlight Report (April - Sept)		X	X	X
	Highlight Report (Oct - March)		X	X	
2016 - 2017	Support Plan	X	X	X	X
	Grant Offer	X	X	X	X
	Regional Plan				X
	Regional Claim Report Third Claim Q3	X			
	Highlight Report (April - Sept)		X	X	X
	Highlight Report (Oct - March)		X	X	
2017 - 2018	Support Plan	X	X	X	X
	Grant Offer	X	X	X	X
	Regional Budget/Spending Plan	X		X	

Study coverage and limitations

1.12 To address some of the key questions for the evaluation about how the grant was used, on what activities and with what results, RECs and LAs were expected to provide monitoring and evaluation data as well as documentary information on what allocations were made and what expenditure was incurred on grant-funded activities.

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[19] Torfaen, Bridgend, Neath Port Talbot, Denbighshire, Isle of Anglesey, Monmouthshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and Powys.

This information was not generally provided, and where it was provided, it was often of poor quality. More specifically:

- There is particularly limited evidence of actual grant expenditure for funded activities, and evidence of grant outcomes;

- Where spend data (planned or actual) was provided, the style and quality of reporting varied greatly. Data inconsistencies/errors (for example breakdown data not adding to total spend, missing figures or information recorded in the wrong cells) were identified and in many cases activity breakdowns were not available. Information on bursary spending was particularly problematic. It was often unclear whether bursary funding for schools/individual pupils was held and spent at LA level or delivered to schools, either via a bidding process or via direct allocations;

- Very little information was provided regarding actual spend by clusters or individual schools receiving money directly from RECs or LAs (data was only available for EAS in 2016/17). Furthermore, the format and content of REC-level funding applications in CSC and GwE was unclear and thus the level of information collected and recorded is unknown.

1.13 As a result, it has not been possible to systematically relate RECs' grant allocations to their spend on specific activities and the outputs and outcomes expected of them. In the absence of data, the evaluation has in many instances used evidence of budgetary allocations instead of actual expenditure and drawn on qualitative interviews of REC leads, Looked After Children in Education (LACE) coordinators and case study participants which describe activities and their perceived outcomes. Figures reported in the report should therefore be viewed as estimations and interpreted with caution.

1.14 There are a few other less significant matters affecting the analysis:

- Interview findings were limited by the knowledge of post-holders. In several RECs and LAs, changes in post-holder over the evaluation period led to gaps in stakeholder knowledge and/or the reporting of contradictory information by different stakeholders. In part this was overcome where previous post-holders could be interviewed;

- While a total of 235 survey responses was received (covering approximately 15 per cent of schools) which provides a convenience sample for analysis of the national picture, it is not sufficient for making detailed comparisons between RECs. It should also be noted that about one fifth of responses (22 per cent)

were partial (i.e. respondents dropped out of the survey before completion), the geographical spread of respondents between LAs was uneven (seven LAs had five or fewer responses, while four had more than 20), and only 46 per cent identified themselves as the LAC lead[20].

Evaluation framework

1.15 The evaluation framework presented below provides a structured approach for assessing each stage of the grant process and answering the research questions.

Figure 1.3: Evaluation framework

Research Objectives	Indicators	Assessment
Governance: Strategic involvement, accountability and transparency.	1. Resourcing is sufficient. 2. All relevant partners are engaged meaningfully in line with expectations and throughout the financial year. 3. Communications are clear and fit for purpose.	1. REC coordinator, LACE coordinator and stakeholder group interviews, e-survey questionnaire responses. 2. Case studies, REC coordinator, LACE coordinator and stakeholder group interviews, REC documents. 3. E-survey questionnaire responses, REC coordinator, LACE coordinator and stakeholder group interviews.
Policy setting: Disbursement, priorities/criteria.	1. Regular review in line with WG policy, wider evidence base and monitoring and evaluation of spend. 2. Policy priorities clearly set out each year and are timely. 3. Policy priorities understood and agreed by all partners.	1. REC documentary analysis, REC coordinator and LACE coordinator interviews. 2. REC documents, REC coordinator interviews. 3. E-survey questionnaire responses, REC coordinator, LACE coordinator and stakeholder organisation interviews, REC documents.
Allocation: Form of grant proposals and consideration of processes shaping implementation.	1. Decisions and rationales reflect evidence of need and what works. 2. Choices in line with REC policy and good practice. 3. All allocations have costings, budget, expected outputs and outcomes, targets 4. Grants used in line with plan expectations (process, budget, outputs) and good practice.	1. Literature review of good practice, REC coordinator, LACE coordinator and stakeholder organisation interviews, LAC focus groups, REC documents. 2. Literature review of good practice, REC coordinator interviews, REC documents. 3. REC documents and REC/LA/school data 4. Literature review of good practice, case studies, e-survey questionnaire responses, REC coordinator, LACE coordinator and stakeholder organisation interviews, LAC focus groups, REC documents and REC/LA/school data on applications and allocations.
Monitoring and evaluation: Systems for monitoring and adapting processes, ensuring sustainability of outcomes.	1. Systems are in place to track spending and monitor uses and beneficiaries of the grant. 2. Measures are in place to regularly assess value for money, the outcomes achieved and their sustainability. 3. LAC and practitioners see that it makes a difference.	1. REC coordinator and LACE coordinator interviews, REC documents and REC/LA/school data. 2. REC coordinator and LACE coordinator interviews, REC documents and REC/LA/school data. 3. LAC focus groups, stakeholder organisation interviews, case studies and e-survey questionnaire responses.

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[20] However, around three-quarters (77 per cent) stated they were a headteacher, a deputy headteacher or a senior leadership staff member so as most responses came from primary schools we might expect the views expressed to be well-informed.

Structure of this report

1.16   The evaluation framework is used to structure the main findings from the primary research around the themes of: governance, policy setting, allocation, and monitoring and evaluation.

1.17   The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 presents an overview of the PDG LAC, including its aims and objectives at national level.

- Chapter 3 presents findings from the literature review on best practice for supporting the education of LAC.

- Chapters 4-7 present findings from the research to provide evidence to assess performance against each of the indicators in the evaluation framework.

- Chapter 8 provides conclusions drawing on all the information collected.

- Chapter 9 provides recommendations for the Welsh Government, RECs, LAs and schools.

1.18   The main report is supported by Annex A: containing literature review references.

2. Overview of the PDG LAC

2.1   This section of the report outlines the background and context of the grant, its aims and objectives, and the Welsh Government's arrangements for funding and guiding each REC in their administration of the grant.

The need for the grant

Educational attainment of LAC

2.2   According to the latest Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census (which replaced the Wales Children in Need Census in 2017), there are around 5,780 LAC[21] as at 31 March 2017. LAC numbers vary greatly by LA, with Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf supporting 690 LAC each (equivalent to 1.27 per cent and 1.73 per cent of the total pupil population, respectively), compared to 80 in Ceredigion and 110 in Pembrokeshire (0.84 per cent and 0.63 per cent of the total pupil population respectively)[22].

2.3   Research shows that LAC have often experienced trauma in their lives including abuse, neglect or loss, which can have a debilitating long-term impact.[23] Care-experienced young people overcoming traumatic early life experiences and those who continue to have turbulent home lives often struggle with attachment difficulties and lack of confidence. They may also be affected by poor concentration and behaviour at school which can have a negative impact on their ability to learn and achieve their academic potential.

2.4   At a systemic level, factors influencing the attainment of LAC include:

- **Placement stability** – Significant reductions in educational attainment are observed among LAC in line with the number of care placements;

- **Placement length** - Children who stay in one care placement for longer achieve better educational outcomes than those who have a higher number of shorter placements; and

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[21] The definition of looked-after children (children in care) is found in the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a council's children's services department has cared for the child for more than 24 hours. In the context of this guide the term 'Looked after children' refers to both children and young people in care.

[22] Percentages have been calculated using January 2017 data from Stats Wales on the total number of school students (all schools), by LA.

[23] E.g. see Richardson, J. & Joughin, C. (2002) *The Mental Health Needs of Looked After Children.* The Royal College of Psychiatrists, London.

- **Quality of education** - LAC are more likely to be in lower performing schools and in lower streams which can have a negative impact on their educational attainment[24].

2.5   Research shows that other factors limiting LAC attainment include changes of school, too much time out of school, a lack of sufficient help with learning/catching up; carers who are not equipped or expected to support their learning and development; a lack of help with addressing their wider emotional, mental and/or physical health needs; a pessimistic view of the education potential and aspirations of LAC held by key professionals; and limited communication between social services and education providers[25].

Trends over time

2.6   There has been some encouraging progress in improving the educational outcomes of LAC over recent years, as shown in Figure 2.1:. However, Key Stage 4, comparisons between 2017 and earlier years should be made with caution because of changes in the definition of this indicator (changes in which qualification elements count towards the literacy and numeracy parts of the Level 2 threshold) although the gap with all children at Key Stage 4 has widened.

Figure 2.1: Trends in looked after children achieving the core subject indicators at Key Stages 2 and 3 and achieving Level 2 Threshold at Key Stage 4* (2010-17)
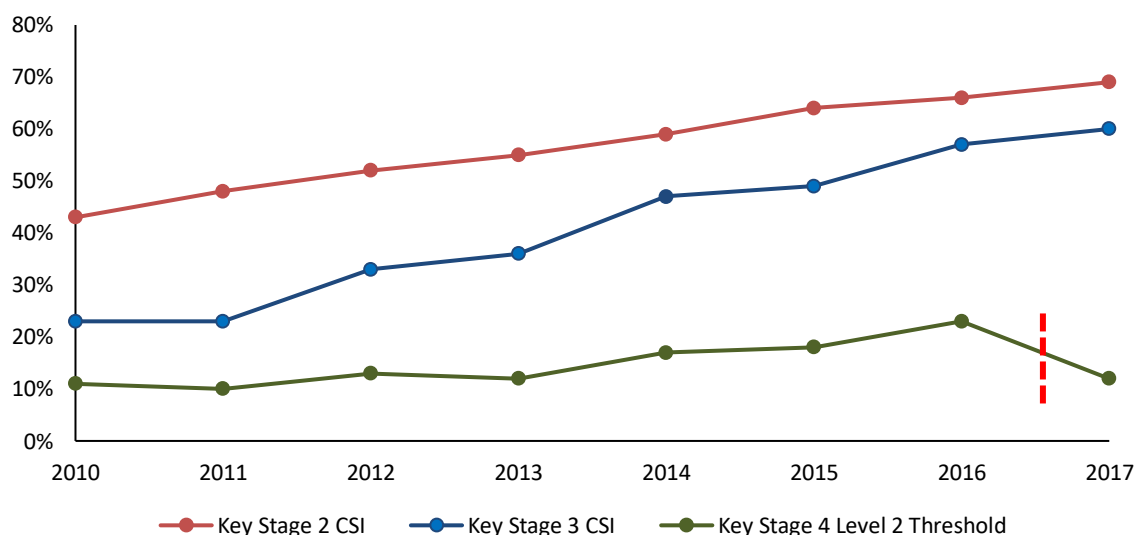
Source: Wales Children in Need Census, 2016 and Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census, 2017.

* Level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics.

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[24] Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., et al., 2015. *Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales.*

[25] Ibid.

2.7   In line with attainment, school attendance among LAC has increased slightly but consistently in recent years, rising from 93 per cent in 2010 to 96 per cent in 2015, 2016 and 2017[26]. In 2016/17, LAC had an absence rate of 4.5 per cent; this compares favourably to a national absence rate of 5.9 per cent for all pupils in secondary schools and 5.1 per cent for all pupils in primary schools[27].

The current attainment gap

2.8   Despite this progress, at every key stage, there remains a large attainment gap between LAC and the wider school population, as shown in Figure 2.2:. The disadvantage gap is already starkly present at the Foundation Phase and remains in place across each Key Stage. Because of the small numbers of LAC in some LAs at Key Stage 4, the aggregated figures for Key Stage 4 attainment may not be wholly representative.

Figure 2.2: The gap at Foundation Phase and Key Stages between the educational outcomes of looked after children, and all learners at 31 March 2017
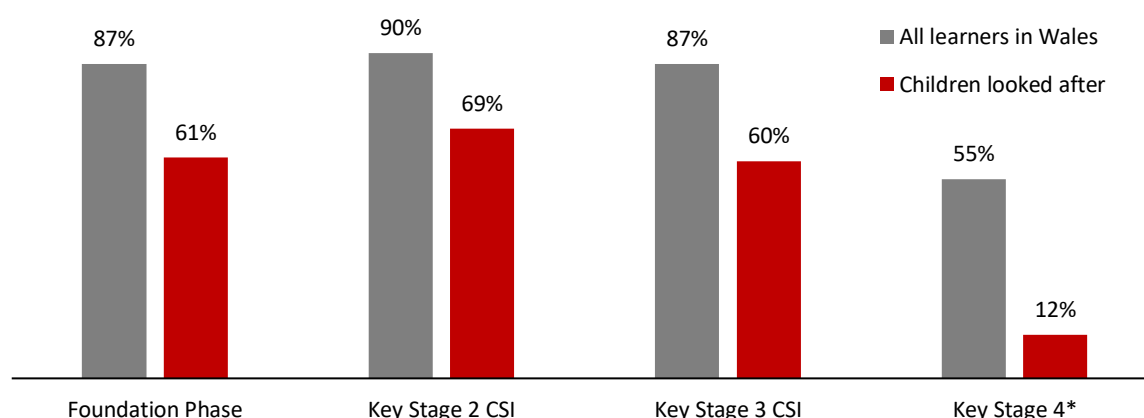
Source: Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census, 2017

* Level 2 threshold including a GCSE grade A*-C in English or Welsh first language and mathematics.

2.9   Table 2.1: below provides a breakdown of attainment by REC[28]. Again, it shows a gap in attainment between LAC and all learners in all years and across every Key Stage. It also shows that there are large differences in attainment between REC areas for LAC (the average percentages for Key Stage 2 range from 41 per cent in GWE to 64 per cent in CSC and for Key Stage 3 from 35 per cent in EAS to 52 per cent in CSC) while there are little differences between them for all pupils; there are large fluctuations between years; and only one discernible trend (an increase in the attainment of LAC at Key Stage 3 in CSC).

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[26] Welsh Government Children in Need Census and Children Receiving Care and Support Census.

[27] Stats Wales, Absenteeism.

[28] There is no data for some RECs because the data is based on small numbers which cannot be reported.

Table 2.1: Attainment levels for each Key Stage in RECs

		Key Stage 2 CSI			Key Stage 3 CSI			Key Stage 4 Level 2		
		2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**
CSC		63.1%	62.8%	65.5%	39.4%	57.0%	60.5%	10.6%	13.1%	No data
	All pupils	*87.8%*	*89.5%*	*90.2%*	*83.6%*	*86.7%*	*87.9%*	*58.5%*	*60.9%*	*54.5%*
EAS		48.0%	69.4%	58.9%	35.1%	30.8%	38.8%	No data	7.4%	No data
	All pupils	*88.1%*	*89.9%*	*90.2%*	*82.2%*	*83.8%*	*86.4%*	*55.1%*	*55.5%*	*52.9%*
ERW		55.1%	47.6%	59.3%	50.0%	47.6%	50.0%	8.7%	22.7%	12.2%
	All pupils	*88.3%*	*88.0%*	*88.8%*	*84.3%*	*85.6%*	*87.2%*	*61.0%*	*64.0%*	*57.3%*
GWE		No data	28.6%	52.6%	45.0%	30.4%	49.2%	No data	No data	No data
	All pupils	*88.2%*	*88.8%*	*90.4%*	*86.1%*	*87.8%*	*88.7%*	*57.5%*	*59.6%*	*53.6%*

Source: Wales Children Receiving Care and Support Census, 2017

Post-16 progression

2.10 LAC have poorer future prospects upon leaving compulsory education. Just 57% of care leavers were in education, training or employment on their 19th birthday in 2015/16[29], although this rate has been improving over the last few years. Far fewer progress to A levels or higher education and relatively more require support to gain employability skills and progress into employment than their peers.

Policy context of the grant

2.11 In January 2016, the Welsh Government published a joint strategy between the Department for Education and Public Services and the Department for Health and Social Services for raising the ambitions and educational attainment of LAC[30]. This strategy had two national objectives:

- Raising the educational attainment of 15-year-old children who are looked after at Key Stage 4 of the Level 2 inclusive threshold from 17 per cent in 2014 to 25 per cent in 2016; and

- Ensuring that 75 per cent of care leavers on their 19th birthday are in education, employment or training by 2018.

2.12 The strategy is supported by an action plan focusing on six main themes[31], as shown in 0.

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[29] Welsh Government, October 2016. *Adoptions, outcomes and placements for children looked after by local authorities in Wales, 2015-16 – Revised*.

[30] Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after

[31] Welsh Government, 2016. *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: Action plan 2015–16*.

Box 2.1 Action plan themes for looked after children in education, 2016-19

1. **Effective leadership – roles and responsibilities:** ensuring professionals across a range of disciplines execute their function and responsibility for LAC to deliver the right outcomes.

2. **Building effective partnerships and collaboration:** engendering partnerships and collaboration to ensure professionals work more effectively together to support LAC in education.

3. **Effective teaching and learning:** ensuring schools and further education institutions recognise the key role they can play in improving the quality of life of LAC through education, and understand these children's circumstances and needs to deliver outstanding and sustainable practice.

4. **Making better use of data:** ensuring that high quality and reliable data collected on LAC after is used robustly so that interventions to support these children are evidence-based, timely and effective.

5. **Strengthening funding arrangements:** developing a close working partnership between the Welsh Government and RECs to ensure that the PDG is utilised as intended and the funding makes a real impact in improving the educational performance of LAC.

6. **Participation of children who are looked after and adopted:** ensuring LAs work effectively with appropriate partners to ensure a range of opportunities are provided to support the participation of LAC in decisions that might affect them, informing strategic approaches and operational decision making.

Source: Welsh Government Action Plan.

2.13 Across these themes, a total of 37 key actions were outlined to be taken forward by the Welsh Government, LAs, RECs, schools and further education institutions over a three-year period from 2016 to 2019. These actions were to be supported by a range of third sector partners.

2.14 The PDG for LAC relates most directly to theme one in 0 on effective leadership and theme five on strengthening funding arrangements, but the grant funding can clearly serve as a source of support for implementing other aspects of the strategy (such as effective teaching and learning and making better use of data), since the strategy and the PDG both ultimately aim to raise the attainment of LAC.

2.15 One of the key actions for theme five was conducting a performance review each year to check progress and ensure support is working effectively. The first of these progress reports was published in May 2017[32]. Progress in strengthening funding arrangements is presented alongside the action plan in Figure 2.3:.

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[32] Welsh Government, 2017. *Raising the ambitions op. cit.*

Figure 2.3: Progress[33] compared against action plan[34] for theme no.5 – 'strengthening funding arrangements'

Action Plan	Progress Report
• *Actions to be delivered between Summer term 2016 and summer term 2017:* • Reinforce the RECs accountability for delivering results, a new reporting process will be introduced to better track and monitor expenditure (summer term 2017). • A rapid review process will be introduced to evaluate the effectiveness of the first year of a new approach to the PDGfunding for LAC (summer term 2016). • Capture information on effective interventions which are proven to have the greatest impact on the educational outcomes of LAC and adopted children (spring term 2017). • The Welsh Government and Adoption UK (Wales) will develop guidance to help schools support adopted children in education (spring term 2017).	• *Progress made between January 2016 and February 2017:* • Commissioned the Wales Audit Office to review the use of the LAC element of the PDG in the financial year 2015/16. • Supported RECs and encouraged cross-consortia working to ensure that spending plans are robust and that the grant is being used effectively to supported LAC in education. • Sought to ensure that the governance arrangements for the administration of the PDG are robust and that spending plans for 2016/17 were scrutinised and approved by the Welsh Government. The Government has also met regularly with RECs to check progress, and has produced and communicated guidance on the grant to relevant stakeholders.

The Pupil Deprivation Grant

2.16   The PDG was introduced by the Welsh Government in 2012 to provide additional funding to schools to help improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged learners aged 5-15 who were eFSM or LAC aged 4-15. The grant was later extended to disadvantaged children in early years settings. The overall aim of the grant was to support schools to meet the objectives laid out in the Welsh Government's Tackling Poverty Action Plan (2012-2016)[35], namely to mitigate the effect of poverty, assist those in poverty to improve their chances of employment and prevent future poverty

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[33] Welsh Government, 2017. *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: One year on*.

[34] Welsh Government, 2016. *Raising the ambitions Action plan 2015–16* op.cit.

[35] Welsh Government (2012) Tackling Poverty: Action Plan 2012 – 2016.

and, in particular, narrow the gap in achievement between children who are eFSM and those who are not[36].

2.17   However, given that it was a shared grant for eFSM pupils and LAC and was allocated directly to schools, stakeholders suggested that this sometimes resulted in resources being poorly targeted for LAC[37]. In addition, owing to the time lag between compiling the statistical data and making allocations to schools, the comparatively high number of school moves made by LAC compared to other pupils, and funding of around £1,000 per LAC, funding was not believed to be necessarily available to LAC in the schools they were attending nor supporting more effective practice or delivering improved outcomes for these pupils.

2.18   In line with these concerns, independent evaluation of the PDG found that, while the PDG was relatively successful in focusing efforts on raising the attainment of eFSM pupils, much less attention was given to LAC[38]. The evaluation also found that only a few schools reported that LACE coordinators played a role in challenging or endorsing spending or targeting. It recommended a more systematic approach to collaboration and sharing best practice, with greater involvement from RECs to ensure the aims of the PDG are met by schools[39].

2.19   Final evaluation results published in December 2017[40] paint a similar picture. Reporting survey results from 2014 (prior to the change in funding arrangements), 93 per cent of primary and 98 per cent of secondary school respondents thought the PDG was intended to benefit eFSM pupils, while only 15 per cent of primary and 23 per cent of secondary school respondents said LAC.

Aims and objectives of the PDG LAC

2.20   In response to these concerns, in April 2015 the PDG was separated into two funding streams: one for LAC and one for eFSM pupils. The grant was also re-named the Pupil Development Grant in 2017. Each funding stream has different arrangements

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[36] Wales Centre for Equity in Education (2014) Making Effective Use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: a resource for education leaders and practitioners. Wales Centre for Equity in Education. Available online at: http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/media/uwtsd-website/content-assets/documents/equity-in-education/making_effective_use_of_PDG.pdf

[37] Cited in publicly available letter written by Steve Davies, op.cit.

[38] There are relatively few references to the use of the grant for LAC in Pye, J., Taylor, C. and Huxley, K. (2015) *Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: 2nd Interim report*

[39] Ibid

[40] Pye, J., Taylor, C. and Huxley, K. (2017) *Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: final report, Social Research Number 77/2017*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

for allocating the grant to deliver support. The eFSM grant continues to be allocated directly to schools, while the PDG for LAC is managed and administered by RECs rather than being directly delegated to individual schools, or to LAs.

2.21   From the outset, the Welsh Government expected RECs to work collaboratively with LAs, schools and other partners to develop effective interventions that provide improved educational outcomes for LAC across the region[41]. Any delegation of funding to LAs or schools was expected to be exceptional and only where plans are consistent with regional approaches[42]. This should achieve economies of scale in the planning of interventions and in their implementation.

2.22   The remit of the funding for LAC was also expanded to include children and young people adopted from care and those who leave care, since these pupils will still have experienced grief, loss or traumatic experiences early in their lives which can have a lasting impact on their education.

Funding allocation arrangements

2.23   Funding allocations for each REC are calculated using Social Services Departments Activity (SSDA) data on the number of children who are looked after within each REC's geographical area as of 31 March in the previous year. In 2015-16, for each LAC child aged 4-15 the REC received £1,050 of funding. In 2016-17, a larger provision of £1,150 per LAC was available. Table 2.2: shows the funding allocations.

Table 2.2: PDG LAC funding allocations in financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17

Consortium	Allocation (£) 2015-16	Allocation (£) 2016-17
CSC	1,347,150	1,302,950
EAS	761,250	727,950
ERW	1,150,800	1,068,350
GWE	661,500	671,600

Source: Welsh Government

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[41] Welsh Government, 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant to support the educational attainment of looked after children: Frequently asked questions*.

[42] Letter written by Steve Davies op. cit.

Priorities, expected activities and outcomes

2.24 The new grant arrangements were intended to ensure more targeted and effective support for LAC pupils and previously LAC. Expected benefits included[43]:

- **Improved strategic approach to funding decisions:** a more regionally coherent, strategic and targeted approach to supporting LAC in education underpinned by clear evidence of what works, overseen by a new lead coordinator with relevant knowledge and expertise. A larger pot of money would allow more strategic funding of training and support for LAC within RECs.

- **Reduced bureaucracy and administration:** the simplification of processes and reducing time lags in the flow of funding and the burden of grant-related administration in schools.

- **Expanded range of beneficiaries:** greater flexibility to support previously LAC who are adopted, who are subject to a special guardianship order, a child arrangement order or a residence order, as well as determining effective interventions regardless of care or school placement changes.[44]

Planning, monitoring and evaluation

2.25 The Welsh Government requires RECs to provide a plan (known as a support plan) setting out how they intend to spend the PDG allocation in each financial year, and how they will ensure those spending the funds are making effective use of the PDG funding to improve outcomes for LAC. This is expected to precede the expenditure. The template for support plans changed between 2015/16 and 2016/17, to include five response criteria instead of two. The 2016/17 template requested more information from RECs on target setting, activities being undertaken and their associated costs, and how they would be working with a wide range of stakeholders including third sector representatives.

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[43] Welsh Government, November 2015 op. cit.

[44] RECs have the discretion to develop and implement interventions which will have a beneficial impact on other children, provided that they will have a greater benefit on LAC.

Table 2.3: Support plan criteria, by year

2015/16	2016/17
LAC 1. Targets / Outcomes What priorities are you developing for managing the looked after element of the PDG regionally? How are you planning to support schools in improving educational outcomes for these children?	**LAC 1. Priorities** What priorities are you developing for managing the looked after element of the PDG?
LAC 2. Planning Please set out your arrangements for planning and delivering support to LAC and how you intend working with your local authority and LACE Co-ordinators on these proposals?	**LAC 2. Outcomes** How are you planning to support schools in improving educational outcomes for these children?
	LAC 3. Targets What targets are being developed to improve educational outcomes for looked after children?
	LAC 4. Activity Provide details of the actions you intend to take together identifying the costs involved, with any costs, time frames for delivery, intended impact and how you will evaluate the success of the action being taken.
	LAC 5. Regional Planning Please set out your arrangements for planning and delivering support to looked after and adopted children in your region and how you intend working with your local authority and other partners, including schools and the third sector on these proposals?

2.26 RECs are also expected to provide progress reports on their spending and activities using the PDG for LAC in the form of twice yearly highlight reports (covering the periods April to September and October to March). These are structured to provide information on progress against the actions outlined in the annual support plan.

2.27 At the end of each year, RECs must demonstrate that the attainment gap between LAC and all pupils has reduced through the administration of the PDG for LAC. They are expected to produce evaluative reports for the Welsh Government analysing how

expenditure has impacted on educational outcomes[45]. However there is no explicit requirement to measure wider impacts of the grant, such as on emotional wellbeing and attendance, despite Welsh Government guidance documents[46] highlighting the need to address the emotional, social and educational barriers faced by LAC which may prevent them reaching their academic potential.

2.28 At a school level, grant letters from the Welsh Government further highlight the requirements of RECs to ensure schools adhere to the Education (School Performance and Absence Targets) (Wales) Regulations 2011 by

- Ensuring that schools set challenging targets for eFSM learners.

- Supporting schools to plan effectively, making use of school development plans for the use of the PDG.

- Ensuring schools monitor and evaluate the impact of their strategies.

- Utilising Challenge Advisers to provide appropriate support to schools to gets to improve outcomes for disadvantaged learners.

Availability of guidance on the use of the grant

2.29 The Welsh Government has produced several resources to support effective use of the grant and ensure best practices are known about. Key guidance documents are summarised in 0 below. However only one document, the FAQs document published in 2015, and revised in November of the same year, provides information specifically relating to the new grant funding arrangement, including high-level guidance on effective activities. Information on effective activities can be found in some of the other guidance documents but these activities generally refer to disadvantaged pupils in general and are not specific to LAC.

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[45] Welsh Government, November 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant to support the educational attainment of looked after children: Frequently asked questions*.
[46] Ibid.

Table 2.4: Advice on funding best practice

Guidance document	Target audience	Purpose/coverage	Limitations
Welsh Government, December 2013. *Pupil Deprivation Grant: Short guidance for practitioners[47].*	For school staff and relevant staff in RECs and LA Education and Children's services.	This 26 page document is the most extensive the WG has published on the topic. Grant letters for 2015/16 and 2016/17 request that RECs ensure that the grant is used for the purposes laid out in the document.	The guidance discusses the previous grant arrangements. Only one short section specifically discusses LAC.
Welsh Government, April 2014. *Guidance For Using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works?[48]*	Specifically targeted at schools.	Provides more detailed practical advice, drawing explicitly on research, on how schools can most effectively use PDG funding to support disadvantaged pupils.	Not specifically tailored to the needs of LAC; and no longer appropriate as funding is not delegated directly to schools.
Welsh Government, March 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant: Essential guidance.[49]*	For use by all stakeholders involved in grant planning and implementation.	Provides brief factual information and guidance on how to use the grant effectively and how schools should evidence their use of the grant for monitoring purposes.	Not tailored specifically to supporting LAC as it was produced before the separate funding stream was introduced; very little detail is provided.
Welsh Government, November 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant to support the educational attainment of looked after children: Frequently asked questions[50].*	For use by all stakeholders involved in grant planning and implementation.	Provides information on the new grant funding process, aims and objectives and expected outcomes.	Limited information on suggested activities.
Welsh Government, November 2017. *Making a Difference – A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools[51].*	For use by designated LAC staff in schools	This signposts users to the FAQ document and states that RECs must collaborate with LAs and schools in deciding how to allocate the grant.	Focusses on job roles rather than grant usage.

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[47] Welsh Government, December 2013. *Pupil Deprivation Grant: Short guidance for practitioners*.

[48] Welsh Government, April 2014. *Guidance For Using the Pupil Deprivation Grant: What really works?*

[49] Welsh Government, March 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant: Essential guidance*.

[50] Welsh Government, November 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant to support the educational attainment of looked after children: Frequently asked questions* op. cit.

[51] Welsh Government, November 2017. *Making a Difference – A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools*

2.30 A variety of activities funded by the PDG are recommended but most documents focus on school-level not REC or LA interventions. Guidance documents contain the following recommended activities:

- **A guide for the designated person for LAC in schools, 2017:** projects that work on increasing aspirations; mentoring schemes; and projects that ensure the individual needs, requirements and opinions of LAC are considered and met.

- **Essential Guidance, 2015:** individual programmes for LAC learners; whole-school programmes disproportionally supporting LAC e.g. speakers for INSET days, joint planning days for school staff, developing tracking systems for identifying needs and evaluating impact; assessment of learning needs; providing quality feedback; peer tutoring and meta-cognition interventions; and supporting transition arrangements[52].

- **Short guidance for practitioners, 2013:** evidence-based interventions for PDG activities to support disadvantaged pupils in general. At REC level: activities that focus on continued professional development (CPD), partnership working, sharing effective practice and ensuring system leaders. At school level: improving the quality of classroom teaching and the quality of schools by implementing seven low cost high benefit interventions tailored to children's needs (giving high-quality feedback to pupils and teachers, developing children's 'learning to learn' skills, using peer tutoring/peer-assisted learning, involving parents and communities in their children's education, maximising the quality of school leadership at all levels of the school, using homework, promoting extracurricular activities).[53]

- **What really works for disadvantaged/eFSM pupils, 2014:** delivering staff training and developing staff expertise; taking a whole school, strategic approach; collecting data to track disadvantage; improving literacy and learning skills, social and emotional skills, attendance, punctuality and behaviour; tailoring the curriculum; offering enrichment experiences and extra-curricular activities to facilitate out of school hours learning; engaging with parents and carers to increase family learning opportunities; delivering nurture groups; and facilitating on-site multi-agency support.

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[52] A flowchart in Annex A of this document highlights that the grant can be used for any activity for LAC that has: a direct impact on attainment; or a positive impact on attendance, wellbeing, family and community engagement, raising aspirations and/or avoiding NEETs, that could lead to improved attainment.

[53] The effectiveness of activities at school level should be monitored using annual performance data, teacher assessments, reading and numeracy test data, attendance/exclusion data and Estyn inspections

Additional guidance on best practice

2.31   Several of the funding guidance documents listed in 0 refer users to the EEF's Teaching and Learning toolkit of practices to improve the attainment of disadvantaged pupils which are well-evidenced[54]. Guidance on supporting adopted children has also been co-produced with Adoption UK[55]. In addition, Estyn (July 2016) identified a range of good practices for raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of LAC in Welsh schools and LAs[56]. These best practices were identified from visits to 16 schools, six LAs and all four RECs. It is intended for governors, head teachers, senior leaders and staff in schools, LAs and the RECs.

2.32   A research report commissioned by the Welsh Government and produced by Mannay, Staples and Hallett et al. (2015) also highlights effective interventions and good practices to support and help LAC raise their educational achievements[57]. These recommendations are based on a systematic review of existing literature as well as in-depth qualitative research with LAC in Wales. However, the report highlights that the overall evidence base for effective interventions for LAC is weak.

2.33   Finally, a report published by the Wales Centre for Equity in Education (March 2014) provides a resource for education leaders and practitioners on making effective use of the PDG[58]. The 60 page report does not focus solely on LAC but provides an accessible and evidence-rich outline of effective interventions to improve the educational outcomes of disadvantaged young people using the PDG.

The community of practice

2.34   In addition to WG advice and research on best practices in using the PDG, RECs, LAs and schools are encouraged to produce good practice case studies and share other resources with practitioners and carers on an online community of practice called ExChange – Care & Education[59]. The resource hub includes:

- **Case studies** written by schools and LAs on current care and education practice in Wales to support those seeking to develop their approach;

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[54] This was developed by the Sutton Trust and is updated. *Sutton Trust Toolkit*:

[55] *Getting it Right for Every Child*

[56] Estyn, 2016, op. cit.

[57] Mannay, D et al. op. cit.

[58] Egan, D., Saunders, D., and Swaffield, L., March 2014. *Making Effective Use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: A resource for education leaders and practitioners.*

[59] *ExChange – Care & Education*

- **Practice materials** and resources used by education and social care practitioners to support the education of children and young people who are, or have been, in care. These materials largely focus on advice offered by third sector organisations to assist people in their practice. The ExChange: Care and Education website[60] lists contact details for 18 key third sector organisations operating in care and education, including The Fostering Network, Voices from Care Cymru and the Association for Fostering and Adoption Cymru;

- **Research articles and reviews of practice** to measure successes and areas for improvement; and

- **A monthly blog** providing project news updates and highlighting recently added materials.

Key summary points

2.35   The grant is needed to reduce inequities facing LAC:

- There are around 6,000 LAC with considerable variation in the numbers between LAs. LAC's prior experiences and their experience of being in care can have profound effects on their educational progress and attainment which impact on their vocational training and employment prospects.

- While the trend over time shows LAC's attendance and attainment (up to 2016) has generally improved, there is a large gap in attainment between LAC and other pupils at all stages of education, critically at Key Stage 4 which has a great effect on progression[61]. This is found to varying degrees in all REC areas.

- REC areas have very different attainment levels for LAC whereas there is very little difference between them in the levels achieved by all pupils.

2.36   The Welsh Government has a strategy and action plan to raise ambitions and educational attainment of LAC which runs to 2019. The actions have included implementation of the changes to the administration of the PDG LAC. Expenditure of the grant would be expected to support most of the aspects of the strategy.

2.37   New arrangements for the PDG LAC were established at the beginning of the 2015/16 financial year with the management and administration by RECs in collaboration with LAs, schools and other partners. These were expected to achieve

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[60] *ExChange – Care & Education Key Contacts*
[61] Changes to assessment at KS4 from 2017 mean that direct comparison with previous years are not possible.

economies of scale and consistency in spending by introducing more strategic approaches and increasing coordinated approaches to capacity building through REC Coordinators working with LACE coordinators in each LA. As part of these new arrangements:

- The Welsh Government requires annual plans of spending the grant and twice yearly progress reports from each REC. End of year evaluation reports which were specified in guidance have not been required from RECs.

- The Welsh Government's main guidance to the PDG LAC is a FAQ document (2015) supplementing general guidance on the PDG. Guidance on the activities the grant could be spent on varies in depth and nature between different guidance documents on the PDG and the education of LAC.

- There are a variety of other sources of guidance and practice (Estyn, Mannay et al, Wales Centre of Equity in Education, Community of Practice).

3. Literature review findings

Introduction

3.1 This section of the report discusses the evidence base for activities that could be funded by the PDG for LAC. It builds on the findings in Mannay et al.'s (2015) review of effective interventions for LAC. Across studies, intervention effectiveness has been broadly assessed in terms of their positive impact on any of the following: attainment of knowledge and skills, educational achievement, behaviour and attendance, wellbeing, family and community engagement, aspirations and progression to further education, vocational training or employment. Findings have been reported by the main categories of grant spending identified in this report (see chapter 7 for more detail): strategic resources, training, building capacity in the system, and specific support for LAC.

Methodology and data limitations

3.2 In line with findings by Mannay et al. (2015), the current review found very limited evidence of the effectiveness of interventions aiming to support LAC in educational settings to achieve the impacts set out above. A scoping review by Forsman and Vinnerljung (2012) found that little intervention research has shown improvements in educational outcomes for children in care. A systematic review of interventions to support LAC in school by Liabo et al. (2013) concluded that no study was found with robust enough evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of interventions, although promising interventions were identified because they found some positive impacts. Similarly, a recent systematic review of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) evaluating interventions aimed at improving LAC's education (Evans et al., 2017) found that there was some promising but not conclusive evidence of what works because of the variable methodological quality of studies. Furthermore, the authors concluded that a key omission from studies was cost-benefit analyses of the relative savings offered in comparison to not providing the interventions.

3.3 There is a particular scarcity of rigorous evidence of effective educational interventions for LAC in Wales. As a result, much of the literature examined in this section focuses on other parts of the United Kingdom and similar contexts in comparable countries. Where relevant and illustrative, some international studies with robust methodologies have also been included in this review.

3.4 Some literature highlights the importance of engaging LAC in the design and delivery of support, especially those with diverse experiences and views (Barnardo's, 2006; Sebba et al, 2015). Evans et al. (2016) argue that the existing evidence-base is limited by a dearth of theoretically-driven approaches and the inadequate involvement of the target population in developing interventions' theory of change or delivery mechanisms. Some of the literature also highlights the need to take a broader view when considering educational support for LAC. This includes considering the context for learning and the capacity for learning by LAC. Improving the educational achievement of children in care is a complex issue, linked to many other aspects of the care and educational system (Brodie, 2010).

3.5 The following sections discuss the main findings identified in the review, reported by the main categories of grant spending identified in this report.

Strategic Resources

Strategic management

3.6 Liabo et al. (2013) identified three studies examining strategic interventions aimed at changing policy and practice within organisations to support the improved educational outcomes of LAC (Berridge et al., 2009; Harker et al., 2004; Zetlin et al., 2004). Interventions were based on the theory that LAC's education is not well coordinated and their educational progress is not sufficiently monitored. However, while improved collaboration between different services was observed, no clear outcome improvements were found.

3.7 An evaluation of the Virtual School Headteachers (VSH) pilot in England by Berridge et al. (2009)[62] found that the introduction of VSH in pilot areas in England led to better, more strategic approaches to addressing existing management and administration weaknesses, such as inadequate record-keeping, insufficient attention to problems of school attendance, the quality of personal education plans and a failure to engage foster carers as partners. They found that LAC attainment figures were generally better in the pilot areas than overall nationally. However, because of small figures in each authority, observed changes could be attributed to individual differences within the population rather than the introduction of a VSH.

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[62] The evaluation involved interviews with 11 VSHs, 5 children's service directors/senior managers, group interviews with 39 social workers and a survey of young people, foster/residential carers, designated teachers and social workers.

3.8   More recent grey literature has also found that VSH can be effective at a strategic level in improving the educational outcomes of LAC. Based on an analysis of local authority inspection reports and data in England, Ofsted's (2016) most recent annual social care report found that where practice is strong and can be linked to improving outcomes for LAC, VSH play an important role in improving attendance, preventing exclusions and monitoring personal education plans.

Monitoring and evaluation systems

3.9   Grey literature from England and Wales indicates that robust LA-level monitoring and evaluation systems are key to improving the educational outcomes of LAC. Drawing on LA inspection reports and data, Ofsted's (2016) annual review of inspections found that closely tracking the educational progress of LAC leads to appropriate, bespoke intervention and support and can improve the educational progress and attainment of LAC when managed well within LAs. The report also found that where robust progress monitoring was in place, LAs were more successful in supporting care leavers in education, employment and training to reduce the numbers becoming NEETs. Robust data systems allow for the efficient targeting of finite resources to ensure maximum impact (Ofsted, 2012).

3.10   Similarly, in a best practice report drawing on visits to 16 schools, 6 LAs and 4 RECs Estyn (2016) identified robust tracking systems and regular evaluation incorporating feedback from LAC, carers and schools as key features of LAs and RECs that are most effective in raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of LAC. Ensuring schools have comprehensive tracking systems that are used routinely by all staff and analysed by the designated LAC teacher was also identified as central to improving outcomes.

Training

Training for school staff

3.11   This review found no high quality large scale quantitative peer-reviewed research directly examining the effectiveness of training school staff to improve the educational outcomes of LAC.

3.12   A small mixed method impact evaluation of the Attachment Aware Schools project in Bath and North East Somerset's Virtual School (Dingwall and Sebba, 2018) examined the effects of providing training for practitioners on attachment difficulties for LAC and how this can affect learning in sixteen schools. The study found that for

46 targeted 'vulnerable' children from six primary schools, the numbers achieving expectations in reading, writing and mathematics were significantly improved from pre-intervention to post-intervention. However, no data were available specifically on the 'vulnerable' pupils from the other 10 schools who participated in the programme.

3.13   A small qualitative study in the US by Hass et al. (2014) found that social support provided by teachers and school personnel may be one of three key factors that facilitate 'turning point' events in the lives and future educational successes of young care-experienced adults. The authors developed an ecological model of turning points based on findings from interviews with 19 young people who had been removed from their biological parents as children.

3.14   An analysis of diaries and semi-structured interviews with six young LAC in the UK by Sugden (2013) found that providing schools with training on raising awareness of LAC's needs and offering an explanation of some relevant psychological theories, such as attachment theory, may be important in raising attainment levels. These findings should be treated with caution given the small scale of the study.

3.15   Some grey literature from Wales and England suggests training school staff to recognise and meet the social and emotional needs of LAC is an effective way of improving their educational outcomes. In Wales, Estyn's (2016) visits to schools, LAs and RECs found that LAs and RECs that effectively raise the educational attainment and achievement of LAC provide comprehensive training for school staff to help them understand and support the emotional and social needs of LAC. Furthermore, successful schools are characterised by staff who are aware of which children are LAC, possess a clear understanding of their social and emotional needs and are clear about what strategies are available to support them.

3.16   Drawing on LA inspection reports and data, Ofsted (2016) found that where VSH played an important role in improving attendance, preventing exclusions and improving the educational progress and attainment of LAC, they provided strong support to designated teachers, including providing training where necessary.

Training for foster carers

3.17   Evans et al's (2017) review of RCTs identified five interventions delivered by carers within the care setting, but only one study examined the effect of providing training to foster carers (Green et al., 2014). This small-scale RCT in England evaluated the group-based Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Adolescents, which delivers

training and supervision to specialist foster parents for a nine-month period, with a short period of aftercare. At 12 months post-baseline the authors found no effect on any outcome measured including improvements in school attainment or language skills and attendance.

3.18   In a survey of 279 care leavers by Starks (2013), 18% of care leavers said they would not be at university without the support of their foster carers and a further 23% said their foster carers supported their decision to apply to university. The authors concluded that more training for foster carers to help provide guidance and support for LAC aspiring to enter higher education may help raise their educational aspirations.

3.19   A small qualitative study, involving interviews with 15 foster carers participating in the Swedish "paired reading" project, found that both carers and children required support in committing to paired reading (Forsman, 2017). Based on interviews with young people and carers, the study suggests that professionals have a responsibility in helping carers to get involved, in integrating the reading training in everyday life and in implementing the method so that it is being practised according to the participants' conditions and preferences.

3.20   Some grey literature suggests that providing training and support for foster carers can improve the educational outcomes of LAC. Estyn's (2016) review concluded that Welsh schools that are effective in supporting LAC partake in targeted work with carers to develop their skills and understanding to better support the children they look after.

Building Capacity in the System

3.21   This review found no high quality large scale peer-reviewed research examining the effectiveness of staff recruitment/upskilling or networking/best practice sharing at the school or LA level to improve the educational outcomes of LAC.

3.22   A small-scale RCT in the United States by Zetlin et al. (2004) examined the effect of introducing education specialists who are certified special education teachers, with knowledge of the rules and regulations of the school system and resources in the local community. The specialist receives referrals from child welfare agencies when social workers are unable to resolve educational difficulties. The authors found that these education specialists had no significant impact on school attendance, suspension and drop out at 24 months post-baseline amongst LAC aged 5 to 17.

3.23   A mixed methods case study of 32 adolescent LAC in foster care by Weinberg et al. (2014) examined the effects of recruiting an education liaison specialist to address educational barriers and improve their educational outcomes by facilitating stronger interagency cooperation and collaboration. The authors found no statistically significant change in measures of school achievement, or engagement over a three year period, although lower rates of school moves and higher rates of attendance were observed.

3.24   A small qualitative study in Wales by Brewin and Statham (2011) found that the extent of multi-agency working may be one of the factors supporting or hindering the transition to secondary school for LAC. The study drew on interviews with 14 LAC, 22 foster carers, 19 teachers, 3 LACE coordinators and a social worker focus group. A more extensive mixed methods study by Jackson and Cameron (2012)[63] credited inter-agency cooperation and coordination with facilitating improved school attainment for care-experienced young people, based on an analysis of in-depth face-to-face interviews with 170 young people who had been in care in five European countries. Brady (2017) identified information sharing and inter-agency cooperation and coordination as key elements of good practice, based on a review of international literature relating to the educational attainment and progress of children in care.

3.25   Some grey literature from England and Wales highlights the importance of staff organisation and capacity building to support good educational outcomes for LAC. A thematic inspection of nine LAs in England by Ofsted (2012) found that the most effective virtual schools maintained a focus on building capacity across the wider system. Larger virtual school teams in an LA were able to offer direct teaching support to LAC in addition to liaising with schools, attending meetings and offering support and training to a range of stakeholders, which was beneficial for learners. However, these larger teams occasionally lacked the focus that smaller virtual school teams had on building capacity within existing services to support LAC in making educational progress.

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[63] Findings for this study were drawn from a literature and policy review, secondary analysis of published and unpublished statistics, surveys of responsible public bodies in social care and education, including interviews with professionals and managers, and biographical narrative interviews with a sample of 170 young people aged 18–24 in England, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Hungary.

3.26 Ofsted (2012) found that there was no apparent correlation between the size of the virtual school, or the size of the LA, and their capacity to support a designated teacher network. Small virtual schools were found to have sustained well-established, creative and dynamic networks of designated teachers. Inspectors observed that virtual schools with scarce resources were often prompted to work more closely with other colleagues within their LA as well as external agencies as part of an integrated, multi-disciplinary approach out of necessity, but this approach supported a holistic assessment of the educational and wider needs of children in care.

3.27 Estyn (2016) found that schools that are effective in supporting LAC have both a member of the senior management team who has responsibility for delivering the school's strategy for LAC and a committed designated governor who possesses a strong understanding of the needs of LAC.

Specific Support and Resources for LAC

Material resources

3.28 Two quantitative studies suggest that providing LAC with books does not in itself have a positive impact on educational outcomes such as reading skills, educational attainment and attitudes to reading (Mooney et al., 2016; Jackson and Martin, 1998). Accompanying support to use these resources in a constructive way may be important to realise potential benefits which would be consistent with studies for all children.

3.29 Mooney et al., (2016)[64] evaluated the Letterbox Club, which involves children receiving six parcels of books sent through the post over a six-month period, using an RCT. At approximately eight months post-baseline, the authors found that owning books had no effect on any of the outcomes measured for LAC including reading skills and attitudes to reading. Their analysis of the qualitative evidence from carers and LAC suggested that this was because of the lack of support provided to the carers and children in relation to the packs received. The study recommends that for book-gifting programmes to be effective they need to include a focus on encouraging the direct involvement of foster carers in shared literacy activities with the children using the books.

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[64] The trial involved a sample of 116 children in Northern Ireland (56 randomly allocated to the intervention group and 60 to a waiting list control group). Outcome measures focused on reading skills and attitudes to reading at school.

3.30   Similarly, a small scale mixed methods study by Jackson and Martin (1998) found that there was no significant difference in the ownership of books between a group of people who had grown up in care and had a high level of educational achievement and another comparison group of people who had grown up in care but were not high achievers. The authors concluded that this implied that high achievers made more use of the library, suggesting support and encouragement in accessing resources may be more effective and cost-efficient than simply owning resources.

Tutoring programmes

3.31   A literature review by Brady (2017) found that the existing evidence base shows mixed, but largely positive, results regarding the effects of additional tutoring on LAC. Four RCTs evaluating variants of the 'Teach Your Child Well' programme in Canada have found positive results for tutoring interventions indicating promising educational outcomes for children in care (Flynn et al., 2012; Harper, 2012; Harper & Schmidt, 2012; 2016). These interventions ranged from individual direct instruction delivered by foster parents to a group-based tutoring programme run by volunteer tutors. One RCT evaluating the 'Early Start to Emancipation Preparation' programme in the United States found no statistically significant impact (Zinn and Courtney, 2014). Further details are provided below.

3.32   A small-scale RCT in Canada evaluated by Harper and Schmidt (2016)[65] found statistically significant increases in reading decoding, spelling, and maths skills amongst children in grades 1 to 8 living in foster care who received a *group-based* tutoring intervention delivered by volunteers. Effect size was small to moderate for these skills. The tutoring intervention ran for 25 weeks in the first year and for 29 weeks in the second year. Sessions lasted for two hours per week with one or two volunteer tutors running each group.

3.33   Similarly, in Canada:

- An earlier RCT by Harper and Schmidt (2012) found that a 25-week, group-level tuition intervention for 6- to 13-year-olds delivered by trained university students had a significant effect on reading and spelling, but no statistically significant increases in math computation or sentence comprehension;

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[65] Ninety-one children in grades one to eight and living in out-of-home care participated in the study which ran over a two-year period. Half of the children took part in a the direct instruction group tutoring programme while the other half were placed on a waiting list and acted as a control group for the study.

- A similar RCT evaluated by Harper (2012) found that a 30-week, group-level tuition intervention for 6- to 13-year-olds delivered by trained university students had an effect on reading, spelling, and math computation, but not sentence comprehension; and

- A small-scale RCT evaluated by Flynn et al. (2012)[66] found that children aged between 6- to 13-years-old who had received an *individual* direct-instruction tutoring intervention delivered by trained foster parents made statistically greater gains in reading and maths scores compared to those placed in the control/waiting list group. The authors reported positive effects on sentence comprehension and math computation. There was no significant impact on word reading or spelling. The intervention involved delivering three hours of tutoring a week for 30 weeks. The authors note that these findings are important because child welfare services may be able to capitalise on the potential for foster parents to act as resources in improving educational outcomes of children in care.

3.34   In the USA, Zinn and Courtney's (2014) evaluation of a home-based tutoring intervention with 14- to 15-year-olds found approximately two years post-baseline that it had no statistically significant impact on any of the measures used of academic ability or educational outcomes compared to a control group of adolescents in foster care. Notably, the intervention group was older than in the other RCTs described above, and the intervention was delivered by undergraduate and graduate students who received one day of training on commencement of the intervention and ongoing development twice a year. The authors concluded from the qualitative evidence that tutors without sufficient expertise were not well equipped to support these adolescents effectively.

3.35   There is some other evaluative research which has found that structured tutoring for LAC can accelerate the development of their reading skills. A small-scale study of a 'paired literacy' intervention with 35 carers and children in England (Osborne et al., 2010) found that, on average, the reading age of participating children improved by 12 months in the 16 week period of the project. School staff kept in regular contact with the carers and monitored activity.

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[66] Seventy-seven children participated with 42 in the experimental/tutoring group and 35 in the control/waiting list group.

3.36 A study by Finn (2008) evaluated the Reading Rich intervention which included book gifts and work with residential care homes to improve their reading environment, and reading and writing activities. Of 22 children included in the study, 17 increased their reading frequency at post-interviews. The author concluded that the one-to-one sessions between carers and young people appeared to impact on children's reading ability, while the writers' interventions had an impact on their writing.

School transition support

3.37 An RCT in the USA evaluated by Pears et al. (2013) examined the effects of 'Kids in Transition to School', which is a classroom-based programme delivered 2 months prior to pre-school entry and during the first two months of primary school. Children attended 24 sessions that address early literacy skills, prosocial skills and self-regulatory activities, while carers attend eight parallel meetings intended to develop their capacity to support the child in practising new skills, routines and behaviour. For the study, 192 children in foster care were assigned to either an intervention or services as usual comparison condition. The authors found significant, positive effects on early literacy and self-regulatory skills.

Personalised planning

3.38 In a Swedish study, Tideman et al. (2011) examined the experiences of 25 foster children aged 7-11 who had personal development plans developed. At the beginning of the project, children were assessed by a psychologist and a special education teacher to ascertain their baseline cognitive ability. They also administered a range of tests to assess reading, spelling, numeracy, psychological well-being and behaviour, and child-teacher relations. Based on the results of these tests, tailored individualised educational and psychological support plans were developed and implemented for each child over a period of 24 months. At the end of the 24-month period, children were tested again using the same measures. After two years, the children's average scores on IQ-tests, reading, and spelling tests had improved significantly. Tordön et al. (2014) replicated this intervention with 24 children (12 boys and 12 girls). Study results "indicate a significant growth in intellectual capacity, self-concept and literacy and numeracy skills" (Tordön et al., 2014: 43).

3.39 The literature also suggests the importance of career support and healthy relationships education in supporting LAC in education, although no evidence was identified to support the effectiveness of supportive interventions in these areas. Starks (2013) reports that care-experienced students emphasised their reliance on advice and support in applying for higher education, but 41% stated they received no information regarding support for care leavers, though it is not clear whether this was desired from schools or from universities themselves. Focussing on the need for healthy relationships education, recent research in Wales found that young people in care or leaving care are more likely to become parents at a young age than the general population (Roberts et al., 2017). Furthermore, data from the Wales Adoption Cohort Study reveals that more than a quarter (27%) of birth mothers and a fifth (19%) of birth fathers with children placed for adoption were themselves care leavers.

Key summary points

3.40 Despite a relatively small body of robust evidence of effect, the review has identified the following activities as potentially having a positive impact on LAC:

- Interventions that are co-produced with children and young people and consider the broader context and needs of LAC.

- Strategic tools: Establishing robust monitoring systems and tools and clear evaluation procedures that LA and school staff are trained to use. Systems should include clear outcomes measures that focus on capturing wider holistic needs.

- Training activities: Providing training to school staff on the social and emotional needs of LAC and how to meet them; and providing training to foster carers to help them better support children's educational needs at home.

- Capacity building: Building capacity through the wider system through training and providing support to designated teachers, social workers and foster carers.

- Specific support: The strongest evidence base of evaluations with rigorous designs suggests that individual and small group tutoring interventions can be effective in improving the academic skills of LAC. Material resources can be effective but only when combined with the provision of trained support to foster parents or tutors to ensure that young people use resources constructively.

3.41 The review also suggests the following ways to effectively manage and deliver grant funding:

- Recruiting a VSH or having a similarly designated member of staff at LA level who is a senior, experienced educational professional and whose sole remit is to support LAC through strategic planning, clear monitoring and evaluation and networking with wider stakeholders.

- Ensuring a small but well focused and strategic team at LA level that facilitates capacity-building across schools, social work teams and wider stakeholder groups.

- Ensuring each school has a member of the senior management team responsible for delivering the school's LAC strategy, and a designated governor with a strong understanding of the needs of LAC.

4.   Governance

4.1   This section presents evidence on:

- The sufficiency of resourcing, in particular the capacity of REC leads, LACE coordinators and designated LAC leads in schools to coordinate, deliver and evaluate PDG LAC spending;

- Governance arrangements and the extent to which relevant partners are engaged meaningfully in design and planning processes, in line with expectations and throughout the financial year; and

- The clarity of communications and the extent to which communication strategies are fit for purpose.

Resourcing

4.2   According to Welsh Government guidance, every REC, LA and school must have a designated person responsible for LAC. REC-level post-holders should be funded by the PDG LAC but this cannot be used for LA or school-level leads. The table below outlines the requirements and post-holder roles at REC, LA and school level.

Table 4.1: Roles of designated persons

REC leads	LACE coordinators	Designated school LAC lead
Grant planning and delivery: manage and distribute funding and ensure value for money (VfM); lead, manage and develop school based/sustainable model for supporting LAC; arrange regional training and provide school guidance on effective interventions Networking and information sharing: provide guidance, collaborate and meet regularly with LACE coordinators, communicate REC vision and ensure LA alignment; attend bi-monthly meetings of REC leads; coordinate examples of best practice in schools; share information with challenge advisors Monitoring and evaluation: lead collection and analysis of outcomes data; prepare interim and final progress reports for Welsh Government.	Post-holders expected to have clear remit to establish and enforce joint procedures and protocols. Post-holders should: develop ways of obtaining views of LAC; liaise with social services, Careers Wales, youth services, RECs and schools; monitor, collate and analyse performance information on an individual and collective basis; and disseminate good practice, including training.	Post-holders should be responsible for advocating and supporting the needs of LAC within their school. Post-holders should: undertake the role for at least a year; be properly trained; and receive the same prominence as other key school staff.

Source: Welsh Government guidance on regional leads (unpublished); Welsh Government (2017) Making a difference: A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools.

REC level resourcing

4.3   In practice, large variations in the quantity and continuity of REC level resourcing were identified. REC-level resourcing improved in 2016/17 in response to Welsh Government requirements to ensure sufficient REC-level capacity to design, deliver, coordinate and evaluate grant funding:

> "Welsh Government wanted us to appoint someone to look at PDG, build strategic capacity in this area, and to better plan" (REC lead).

4.4   However, Table 4.2: shows that resourcing in the RECs has varied and there have been hiatuses. These could have negatively impacted on the quality of REC-level support. The staff resources in 2017-18 are greater than they were in 2015-16.

Table 4.2: REC-level resourcing

CSC	EAS	ERW	GwE
REC lead in place for half of 15/16 and all of 16/17; started one day a week, then two/three days; with part-time LACE coordinator. No post-holder in place between end of 2016/17 and October 2017 but now full-time role.	Current REC lead in place since November 2015; started working one day a week, now three; also is a part-time LACE coordinator; supported by business and finance manager.	No REC lead in place until 2017/18. Training coordinator oversaw tasks with support from Managing Director.	New REC lead since April 2017; two post-holders prior to that; works 3 days a week; supported by business and finance manager.

Source: REC and LACE coordinator interviews

4.5   Changes in the REC lead over the evaluation period has, to some extent, affected RECs' ability to plan and deliver the grant. For example, one REC reported regional plans being developed by one post-holder but delivered by another and confusion about whether a plan for 2017/18 was ever produced.

4.6   REC leads have varied professional backgrounds. For example, one had a training background, two worked part-time as LACE coordinators while one was previously a head teacher. Some interviewees felt that the prior experience of post-holders affected the extent to which they were familiar with evidence-based practice:

> "If you haven't been a designated LAC teacher, it is hard to cement things in, no matter how much data or evaluative information you have, if you have not had that teaching experience, it is hard to find out what you are doing and why" (LACE coordinator).

4.7   At LA level, LACE coordinator capacity, expertise and working arrangements varied greatly:

- In a few cases, redundancies (due to yearly funding cycles) or retirements led to gaps in resourcing;

- High turnover of post-holders in the last three years were reported in some LAs;

- Some LACE coordinators reported part-time rather than full-time working arrangements while others shared the LACE coordinator post to make up a full-time position;

- LACE coordinators had a broad range of professional backgrounds including teaching, social work and learning coaches/trainers; and

- They were based in different LA departments (Education, Children's Services, Social Services) and service areas, for example Additional Learning Needs, Special Educational Needs, Safeguarding, with variations in grade and reporting levels.

4.8   Interviewees said that several of these factors affected their ability to carry out their expected roles, especially insufficient resourcing and reorganisations. This concerned at least a third of LAs. Also, some interviewees felt that departmental/team arrangements affected the status, influence and priorities of post-holders, their ability to develop procedures and their capacity to network and build strong relationships with stakeholders, particularly schools.

> "There is a lack of clarity here. I would suggest that it's a national lack of clarity, because if the government were to say 'right, this is the status of the LACE officer, the job should be sitting under the leadership of education, not children's services', the situation would change overnight" (LACE coordinator)

4.9   In addition to variations in LACE coordinator resourcing, the size of LA LACE teams, their level of expertise and capacity also varies. Some LA teams reported being well-resourced, particularly in ERW where some of the PDG LAC had been used to fund additional LA-level support staff, while others said they lacked staff to support schools.

4.10   At school level, resourcing arrangements are less clear. Two stakeholders reported
       that not all schools have a LAC lead in place and this affected the level of strategic
       direction and support for LAC among the schools' governing body. Only 46 per cent
       of survey respondents said they were a LAC lead, however it is unclear whether this
       lower than expected proportion was due to completion errors i.e. individuals not
       selecting more than one job role option, or the survey being completed by different
       individuals.

Stakeholder engagement and communications

4.11   Welsh Government guidance[67] requires REC, LA and school-level stakeholders to
       develop regular communications and collaborative working arrangements. More
       specifically, the designated person guidance (Table 4.1:) reports that REC leads
       should share REC guidance, regularly communicate with other RECs, share their
       vision with LAs, and that LAs should work collaboratively with a wide range of
       stakeholders including schools and wider services. Overall, communication strategies
       and stakeholder involvement appears to be mixed: no standardised governance
       arrangements or communication strategies were identified across RECs that
       engaged stakeholders continuously throughout the year.

Use of Welsh Government communications

4.12   All REC and LA-level interviewees who provided feedback on Welsh Government
       communications felt that information on yearly priorities and funding totals was
       provided after the start of the financial year, and at very short notice in both years.
       They reported that this significantly affected their ability to plan and spend the
       allocations especially at the outset:

       "The notification from WG was very short notice – the reallocation of PDG from
       schools to LA was only introduced to us in Feb 2015". (REC lead)

4.13   When asked about their awareness of Welsh Government guidance documents, all
       REC and LA level stakeholders reported awareness of one or more of the guidance
       documents produced by the Welsh Government to support the implementation of the
       PDG LAC and/or wider PDG. The majority of stakeholders said they found them
       useful. Similarly, at school level (Figure 4.1:), most respondents were familiar with
       Welsh Government guidance documents: 80 per cent were aware of the essential

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[67] Welsh Government, November 2015 op. cit.

guidance document, and 73 per cent were aware of the specific guide for designated LAC leads. However, over two fifths of respondents were not aware of the 2013 Short Guidance for Practitioners, over a third were unaware of the 2014 "What Really Works" guidance and the majority of REC and LA level interviewees would like more clarity in the guidance about how the money can be spent.

Figure 4.1: Reported awareness of Welsh Government guidance documents
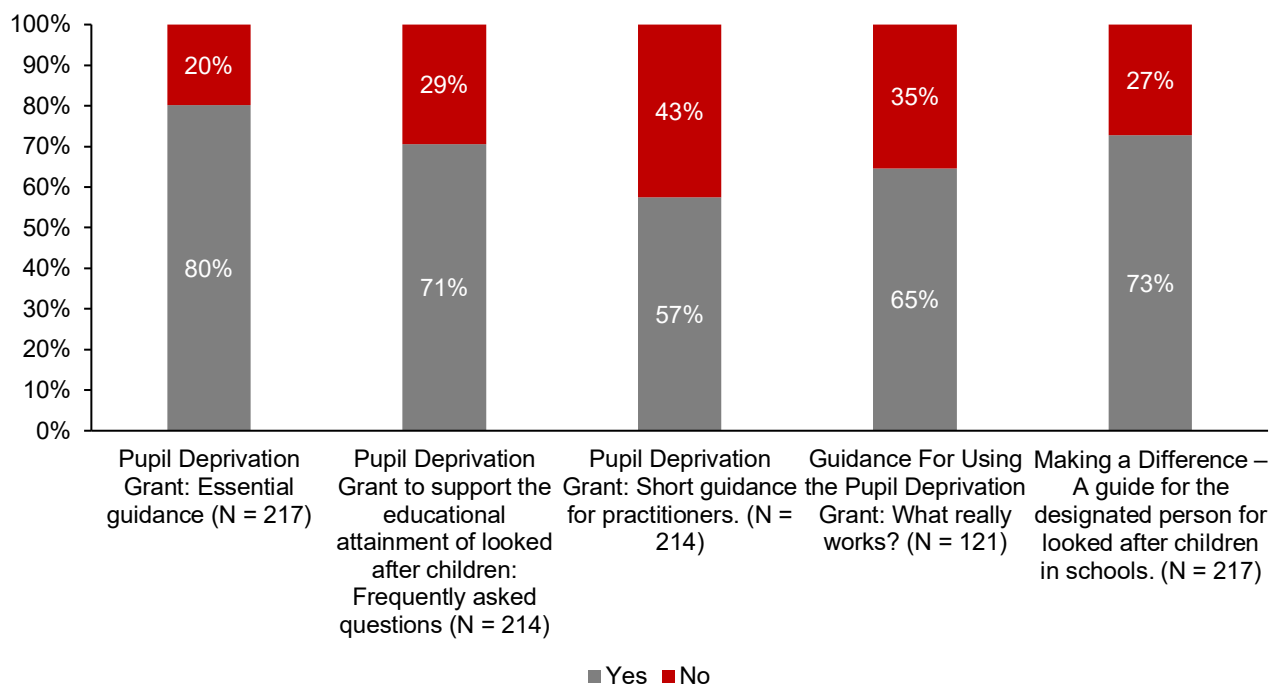
Base: Respondents who were aware of PDG-LAC funding (N = 219). Non-response rates varied (2-6 respondents).

Wider stakeholder awareness and engagement

4.14   National stakeholder organisations reported a general awareness of the grant through their attendance at advisory/strategic groups, for example the National Strategic Group for raising the attainment of LAC, via their day-to-day interactions with LA or REC staff, and/or through interactions with Welsh Government policy leads. However, none had a clear idea of how the money had been spent or at what level and one stakeholder organisation reported no awareness of the grant.

> "I have no sense of how effectively it's being used…. there's no accountability for it and there's a lack of trust around it" (Stakeholder organisation representative).

4.15   Half of stakeholder organisations felt they had not been consulted at national or regional level prior to changes to the grant, although those that had been consulted felt that their views had been taken on board by the Welsh Government. There was

no evidence of REC-level consultation with wider stakeholder groups prior to grant changes or during REC-level planning processes, although one LA reported involving Adoption UK in LA level planning.

4.16   In particular, foster carers and groups supporting foster carers felt that there was a lack of awareness of the grant among foster carers they would like to receive more information on how the grant has been used, at national, regional, and local levels.

> "I think a lot of foster carers don't even know what these grants are, they don't even know who's getting them" (Stakeholder organisation representative).

> "I'm a bit peeved, because I personally think that as a carer, as a person responsible for these children…I'd like to have a say…we're very much out of the loop" (Foster carer).

4.17   In response to earlier feedback from foster carers, in 2016 the Welsh Government funded the publication of "A Foster Carers' Guide to Education"[68], produced by the Fostering Network to raise awareness of the grant among foster carers. This document provides further information on the PDG LAC and includes a link to the evaluation of the wider Pupil Development Grant.

4.18   There is also some evidence from REC and LA level interviews of an increased focus on foster carer engagement at regional and local level. For example, in EAS there is evidence of a strong strategic focus in 2015/16 on better engaging a wider range of stakeholders, including foster carers, and in CSC 2015/16 that they had meaningfully engaged foster carers across the region. RECs and LAs are also increasingly involving foster carers in wider training provision and delivering interventions focussed on educational support at home. However, stakeholder organisations and foster carers felt that more could be done to improve links with foster carers and make them feel more empowered and involved in grant decision-making and use. They suggested:

- Encouraging teachers to discuss PDG LAC spending with carers during parents' evenings;

- Delivering a survey to foster carers to gather their views;

- Providing training to foster carers; and

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[68] The Fostering Network (2016) *A Foster Carer's Guide to Education in Wales*.

- Ensuring that LAC leads in schools are monitoring and encouraging foster carer engagement.

4.19 Several national stakeholder organisations also reported a greater need to ensure LAC are better involved in decision-making processes. There is very limited evidence of LAC engagement at regional level: only ERW explicitly reported consulting with LAC during planning stages. More evidence of LAC engagement was available at LA level, for example at least two LAs funded projects through the grant to better understand the needs of LAC, however LAC engagement in strategic planning and decision making was by no means systematic or widespread in LAs. Several stakeholders suggested better involving young people in setting outcomes at national level as well as providing LAC with more information about what the grant is trying to achieve and how.

National and cross-regional governance arrangements

4.20 At national level, REC leads reported meeting with the Welsh Government each year to discuss the grant changes and priorities. They also meet with the Welsh Government every two months to discuss PDG LAC progress. REC leads reported communicating with each other during each financial year to discuss priorities, and share best practice and challenges, although it is not clear whether this was more than ad hoc. In 2016/17, a National Strategic Group was set up to deliver the LAC education plan and share good practice.

Regional governance arrangements to engage LAs

4.21 Mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and communication varied by REC, however some form of engagement between RECs and LACE coordinators was present in all regions. 0 outlines the governance arrangements in each REC.

Table 4.3: Governance arrangements, by REC

CSC	EAS	ERW	GwE
No formal Steering Group; extensive but informal consultations with LACEs.	Termly regional steering group including LACEs, Challenge Advisor, finance and management staff and REC lead; a LACE coordinator group.	No formal steering group; joint committee/Regional Learning Support Board attended by REC directors and LACEs; a half-termly LACE working group.	Quarterly Regional Strategic Assurance group led by REC lead, attended by LA representatives, LACE coordinators and Cabinet and corporate members; ad hoc meetings with senior managers in other LA teams; quarterly reporting to REC leadership team; regional wellbeing sub-groups.

Source: REC lead and LACE coordinator interviews

4.22   In general, the presence of a formal steering group did not seem to affect the level of collaboration nor signify continued engagement throughout the financial year between REC leads and LACE coordinators. It is likely that variations and gaps in regional and LA level resourcing were a cause of the varied governance arrangements and mixed levels of LACE engagement, but this was unclear from the evidence.

4.23   In **CSC,** no formal steering group has been in place. The process for plan development in 2015/16 is unclear but in 2016/17 the REC lead undertook extensive consultations with LACE coordinators and all felt involved in the planning process and met regularly with the REC lead throughout the year. However, two stakeholders felt that the frequent consultation was slow and inefficient and led to too many plan iterations and revisions and the late finalisation and publication of plans:

> "There seemed to be an awful lot of draft versions that were not being agreed by the consortium for whatever reason" (LACE coordinator).

> "Consortium working does work in certain elements, but when there is money involved, it is very hard to do, it's just boundaries" (REC level stakeholder).

4.24   Despite the presence of a regional steering group in **EAS**, LACE coordinators felt that money was largely just allocated to LAs with no consultation: collaboration occurred between LACEs but they reported no REC-level involvement. Nevertheless, in general they were aware of and happy with the process in 2015/16 as money was allocated directly to the LA. While they had flexibility to spend it as they liked, they met regularly as LACEs and felt that all priorities were well aligned.

4.25 In 2016/17 a review panel was established to review bids for funding and allocate funds to school clusters. The directors of the LAs and EAS were responsible for making funding decisions which, according to REC staff were disseminated to the EAS School Improvement Group, the LACE coordinator group and foster care teams through the PDG LAC steering group. However, in practice LACE coordinators did not report that funding decision information was shared nor that they were involved in the review panel.

4.26 As a result, they felt they had little to no understanding of how money was allocated in 2016/17 other than that it went directly to schools. All LACE coordinators reported considerable frustrations with the process, and suggested that school staff were also not well engaged:

> "My only involvement has been head teachers calling me up and complaining that they're not being listened to, or they weren't told of the process, or the process isn't clear, or who is this person who's making the decision because they don't know who they are. It hasn't been a positive experience" (LACE coordinator).

> "I would say the majority of the schools are quite negative towards EAS in that they feel it's a bit 'big brother'" (LACE coordinator)

> "The children are getting a bad service, the money's being wasted, and [the consortium] are busy ticking boxes because it's school-to-school working" (LACE coordinator)

4.27 In **ERW,** all LACE coordinators were called together to devise a plan for spending in 2015. According to one stakeholder, this was the first time that LACE coordinators had been brought together to work collaboratively. No formal steering group was in place in either year and there was no official REC lead so statutory directors were in charge of implementing and managing the regional plan. However, LACE coordinators sit on the Regional Learning Support Board and attend a half-termly LACE coordinator working group. All LACE coordinators felt well involved in planning processes in both years, although the extent of continued information-sharing from REC level throughout the year was unclear. One LA highlighted how much they valued ERW's approach to collaboration: the REC acted as an overall advisor but let LAs plan the work themselves:

> "I think the fact that we were given the opportunity to create the plan ourselves was a benefit….so the starting point was with us who are the people who are going to implement it. In hindsight it was an excellent way to do it…. unless

you've worked in the sphere of LAC you can't [develop a plan] so it had to be us that developed the plan." (LACE coordinator).

4.28 However, several LACE coordinators felt that the lack of a formal steering group and REC lead may have led to a lack of strategic oversight at regional level. They would have welcomed more continuous collaborative working arrangements, particularly best practice sharing, at regional level:

> "At the beginning I thought we would come together more as a team and be one collective rather than, you know, working in our silos" (LACE coordinator).

> "There must be stuff from the other five local authorities that we in [the LA] can learn from, I know there is, and I see the mechanism for that sharing of information and the better learning as ERW, I see that as ERW's responsibility, but I haven't seen evidence of that" (LACE coordinator).

4.29 In **GwE**, there is a Regional Strategic Quality Assurance Group responsible for ensuring consistency across the region and identifying regional and cluster to cluster working which is attended by the REC lead, LA representatives, LACE coordinators and Cabinet and Corporate members. However, there were mixed perceptions among LACEs regarding their involvement in grant planning. They reported that communications were particularly poor in the first year (2015/16) but this was attributed to funding being received so late and not the direct fault of the REC. In the first year they felt that some decisions, particularly regarding training, had already been made at REC level before they were consulted:

> "These decisions are made by education directors more than anything and then this information is shared with us as coordinators" (LACE coordinator).

> "[The consortium] did hold a meeting with each LA individually, but by the time these meetings were held, a lot of the decisions regarding the direction of the grant had already been made, such as training and so on" (LACE coordinator).

4.30 However, in the second year they reported much closer collaboration and regular six-weekly meetings. LAs felt that the REC acted as a constructive 'critical' friend but allowed LACEs the freedom to develop their own local plans to meet needs:

> "We have terms of reference now, a better understanding of what we are doing together and what we are working towards" (LACE coordinator).

> "The benefit of this year [2016/17] is that myself and the other senior managers have had more freedom and more collaboration with [the consortium] to design the strategic things we needed to do and this has moved us in the right direction" (LACE coordinator).

Regional and local communication strategies to inform LAs

4.31 There was no evidence of the existence of communication strategies or mechanisms for information-sharing between RECs and LAs other than the governance arrangements reported above. No examples were identified of effective REC-level best practice sharing with LACE coordinators or of the dissemination of monitoring and outcomes data and no regional level final reports were provided to ICF. However, most LACE coordinators reported meeting and collaborating regularly within their region to discuss priorities and share ideas and best practice, often through a formal LACE coordinator steering group.

REC and LA governance arrangements to engage schools in grant planning

4.32 Schools were generally not involved in REC and LA planning processes and felt that planning did not involve consultation or engagement with the right people. There is no evidence of school-level involvement in REC level governance arrangements. Inconsistent evidence of the presence of LA-level strategic groups was available and for those LAs who did report a local-level planning group, it was unclear how regularly school staff were involved. One LA in GwE reported a LAC strategic planning group at LA level to decide on the use of the PDG LAC funding. This group included the LACE coordinator, a Behaviour Support Officer, social workers, representatives from secondary and primary schools, a Social Services manager, a PRU representative and an Independent Reviewing Officer. It was identified as a successful mechanism for managing the grant at LA level because it was:

> "A group of like-minded professionals who all have direct contact with LACs and awareness of their individual needs" (LACE coordinator).

4.33 When money was held at LA level, there was limited evidence of schools being involved in LA level processes to allocate the grant funding received. For example, while one LA in GwE reported the presence of a local level 'panel' for reviewing school funding applications, only LA level staff were involved (the LACE coordinator, the LA Wellbeing Officer, the Home Education Officer and the Educational Psychologist). In line with these findings, most school staff did not feel sufficiently engaged in planning processes.

4.34 Less than a fifth of survey respondents who provided an answer were involved or consulted in the design of the regional plan or strategy (15 per cent) or the local plan or strategy (18 per cent) (Figure 4.2:). Less than half of all respondents who provided

an answer strongly agreed or agreed (43 per cent) that the regional plan or strategy involved consultation and engagement with people who know what is needed. Importantly, the same proportion of respondents responded that they 'don't know' which suggests a more general lack of awareness about the consultation and engagement strategies used by RECs in designing their plans or strategies. Compared to the regional plan or strategy, fewer respondents felt that the right people were involved in the creation of the local plan or strategy. Only 38 per cent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed, compared to 32 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 4.2: Views on whether consultation and engagement were sufficient
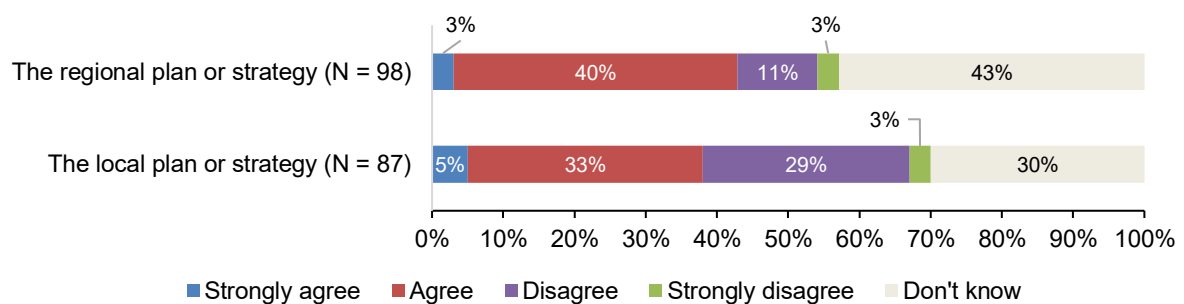
Q: To what extent do you agree that the regional plan or strategy / local plan or strategy involved consultation and engagement with people who know what is needed?

Base: Respondents aware of regional plan or strategy, non-response excluded. Regional plan or strategy, N = 102 (four respondents did not answer this question). Local plan or strategy, N = 92 (five respondents did not answer this question).

4.35 In both 2015/16 and 2016/17, less than half the respondents believed that school-level funding decisions were made in collaboration with: other schools as part of a school cluster; in collaboration with LA or REC-level stakeholders; or in collaboration with other school staff (Figure 4.3:). However, in the second year of the new funding structure, more schools were working together or as part of a school cluster (40 per cent of respondents in 2016/17 compared to just 15 per cent in 2015/16). In addition, slightly more school funding decisions were made in collaboration with LA or REC level staff in the second year (an eight percentage point difference). The number of funding decisions made at school level in collaboration with other school staff appeared to stay the same over both years.

Figure 4.3: How were school-level funding decisions made?

School-funding decisions made in collaboration with other schools/as part of a school cluster: 2015/16 = 15%, 2016/17 = 38%

School-funding decisions made in collaboration with LA or REC-level stakeholders: 2015/16 = 22%, 2016/17 = 30%

School-funding decisions made in collaboration with other school staff e.g. governors, head teachers, teachers or support staff?: 2015/16 = 41%, 2016/17 = 40%
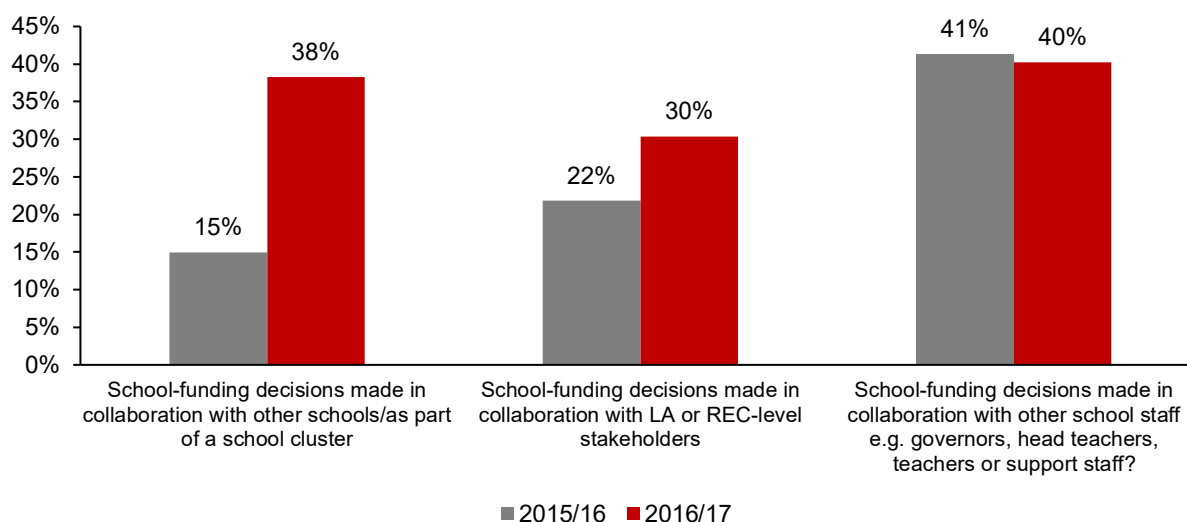
■ 2015/16   ■ 2016/17

Base: Respondents whose schools directly received PDG LAC grant funding (N = 87 in 2015/16, 102 in 2016/17).

Communication strategies and mechanisms for informing schools

4.36 Some evidence of REC level communications with schools was identified. For example, CSC reported sending out letters to schools to communicate the regional plan in 2016/17 and held briefing meetings and consultations with schools. At LA level, there is some evidence from interviews of LAC teacher forums or groups receiving information from LACE coordinators about grant changes and local plans. However, communication plans to inform schools of grant arrangements and plans were reportedly largely ad-hoc and inconsistent. This led to varied levels of awareness among schools of grant changes, and of regional and local plans.

4.37 The majority of survey respondents were aware of the PDG LAC grant (96 per cent), however fewer respondents (68 per cent) stated that they were aware of the changes to the grant allocation. Exactly half of all respondents were aware of *regional* strategies and plans, and slightly less (46 per cent) were aware of *local strategies* and plans.

4.38 Various dissemination methods were identified at national level. When respondents were asked to explain how they were made aware of the changes, 135 responses were provided. Most survey respondents were made aware of grant changes by their local authority (47) via emails or face-to-face meetings, although some (22) found out through REC level meetings or training. Others reported finding out about it through emails (10) or training events/forums (7) although it is unclear who disseminated this information. Other methods included network or cluster meetings (10), from

colleagues or the headteacher, LAC staff in school or from other schools (22), through their own research (5) or from social workers linked to the school.

4.39   In line with dissemination methods for general grant changes, most respondents said they were made aware of regional and local plans through local level meetings/working groups/steering groups or communities of practice (48 per cent for regional plans and 57 per cent for local plans. Respondents answering "other" specified that they received information via email or informally via headteachers, other school staff or the LA (Figure 4.4: and Figure 4.5:)).

Figure 4.4: How were you made aware of the regional plan or strategy?
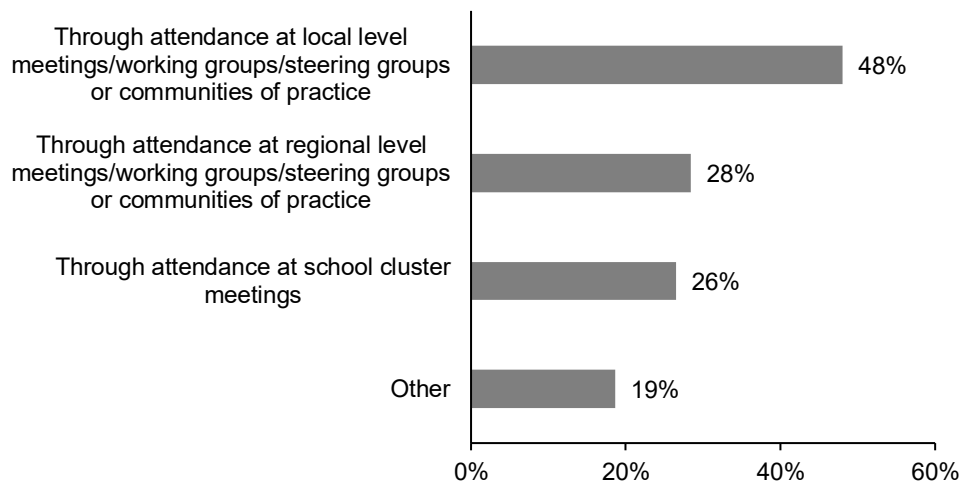
Base: Respondents aware of regional plans or strategies (N = 102). Tick all that apply.

Figure 4.5: How were you made aware of the local plan or strategy?
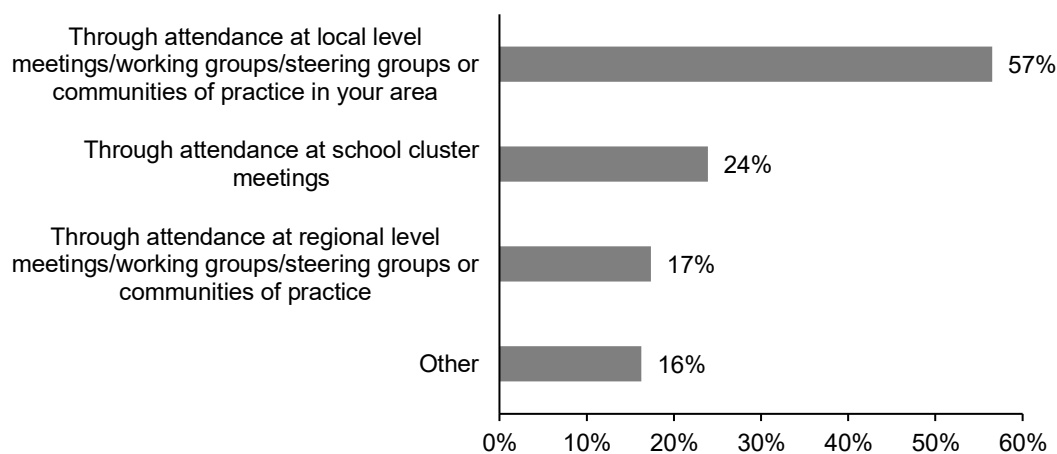
Base: Respondents aware of local plans or strategies (N = 92). Tick all that apply.

School level views on communications

4.40   The majority (63 per cent) of respondents who answered agreed or strongly agreed that the regional plan or strategy was communicated well to stakeholders, however over a quarter of respondents (29 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Findings were less positive for local plans, with 53 per cent reporting agreeing or strongly agreeing that it had not been communicated well, and only 34 per cent reporting that it had.

School awareness of regional or LA-level activities and how to access funding

4.41   REC leads and LACE coordinators reported regularly disseminating training schedules and plans to schools, although it is less clear how information about other REC level activities was shared. School respondents reported relatively good awareness of training opportunities but limited awareness of other REC and LA level PDG LAC spend.

4.42   When asked about their awareness of regional or LA-funded activities, more than half (58 per cent) were aware of training/professional development opportunities to understand the needs of the LAC in their school (Figure 4.6:). However, all RECs reported delivering training to school staff across both years.

4.43   Close to half (43 per cent) of respondents were aware of networking and shared learning opportunities. A quarter of respondents were aware of staff recruitment at LA level to support training or school-level activities (26 per cent). Awareness was highest in ERW (44 per cent) where more funding was allocated to LA level staff than in other regions. A quarter (25 per cent) of respondents were aware of monitoring and evaluation while 16 per cent of respondents said they were not aware of any of these activities. 'Other' responses included: grants in CSC (one response); cluster working in EAS (three responses); extra tuition in ERW (one response); and an 'initiative in school to provide extra opportunities for the identified learners' in GWE (one response).

Figure 4.6: Awareness of regional or LA-funded activities

Category	Value
Training and professional development of skills to better support and understand the needs of LAC in school	58%
Networking and shared learning opportunities e.g. conferences or networking events	43%
Recruitment of staff at LA level to support training or school-level activities	26%
Monitoring and evaluation support/systems e.g. new systems for tracking LAC funding or monitoring outcomes of the grant funding	25%
None of the above	16%
Other	3%

Base: All respondents aware of PDG-LAC funding (N = 219). Tick all that apply.

4.44 Awareness of how to access grant funding improved between 2015/16 and 2016/17 but was not universal. When funding changed to a regional application process (EAS and CSC in 2016/17), there is some evidence that schools were provided with clear information on how to apply. For example, EAS provided a guidance document to schools in 2016/17 when funding changed to cluster bidding, but it is unclear how this guidance was disseminated and how successfully. Where bursary funding was available to bid for from the LA, LACE coordinators sent out communications to inform schools about funding opportunities and priorities but again, it is not clear how systematically and regularly this information was shared.

4.45 More respondents were aware of the process for accessing funding in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16 (74 per cent compared to 59 per cent). Of the respondents who did not access funding or only receiving it in one of the years, the majority stated that the main reason was a lack of awareness of how to access it (26 responses); followed by 'because they did not have LAC students or did not require it' (24); or 'because their bid was not successful' (three).

4.46 It was more common for those who did not access funding at all in both years to not know the processes for accessing funding because they did not have any LAC students or did not require it (16 respondents who did not receive funding at all stated this as their reason, compared to eight respondents who stated they were not aware of how to access the funding, and one respondent who said their bid was not successful).

Evidence of formal best-practice sharing arrangements

4.47 Some examples of effective best practice sharing structures/mechanisms were identified, but these were often LA-LA level (for example through LACE coordinator steering groups) rather than facilitated by RECs. For example, one LACE coordinator in ERW highlighted that while they were aware that work to identify best practice had taken place in ERW, it had not been shared with LAs:

> "I think this is one area to develop. We need to make more of our shared expertise regionally and nationwide" (LACE coordinator).

4.48 More formally, CSC documentation reported that the LACE teams collaborate frequently to ensure best practice examples are identified and shared and in ERW, one highlight report mentioned that LACE coordinators would start using the HwB platform and develop community networks to share best practice and disseminate information. However it is unclear the extent to which this occurred in practice. It is also unclear the extent to which best practice was shared between RECs. Overall, most best practice sharing appeared to be largely informal or ad-hoc. The majority of LACEs said they wanted to receive more information from RECs and to better facilitate best-practice sharing.

Key summary points

4.49 This section found that:

- Welsh Government requires every REC, LA and school to have a designated person responsible for LAC who is in charge of coordinating, delivering and monitoring grant spending and supporting networking and best practice sharing. In practice, large variations in the quantity and continuity of REC, LA and school level resourcing were identified. These variations may have affected the quality, consistency and content of work at each level.

- At national level, Welsh Government communications on changes to the grant, grant allocations, priorities and expected use of the grant were often provided after the beginning of the financial year which affected grant planning and spending. However, most stakeholders were aware of Welsh Government guidance on the use of the PDG LAC or wider PDG, particularly the more recent guidance documents, and the majority found them useful.

- Wider stakeholder organisations representing LAC and other vulnerable young people reported a general awareness of the grant changes, however some had

not been consulted on changes and none had a clear idea of how the money was spent. Some also called for more systematic involvement of LAC in planning and governance processes.

- Welsh Government guidance requires RECs, LAs and schools to communicate regularly with wider stakeholders and develop collaborative working arrangements. However, regional governance arrangements varied considerably between RECs: some RECs had formal steering groups while others relied on more ad-hoc, informal consultations with stakeholders. There were mixed levels of engagement of LACE coordinators in regional planning processes and mixed awareness of regional activities/plans within LAs and schools.

- No formal communication mechanisms were identified for the sharing of information between RECs and LAs however regular information sharing was identified between LACE coordinators in most regions (for example, through LACE coordinator steering groups or more informally).

- Schools were generally not involved in REC and LA planning processes and when money was held at LA level, there was limited evidence of schools being involved in LA level processes to allocate the grant funding received. In 2016/17, more school level decisions were made through cluster level collaboration or with LA or REC level stakeholders than in 2015/16.

- Schools reported varied levels of awareness of grant changes and of regional and local plans. Varied dissemination methods were identified, although most schools were informed via local rather than regional channels. School respondents reported relatively good awareness of training opportunities but limited awareness of other REC and LA level PDG LAC spend. Awareness of how to access grant funding improved between 2015/16 and 2016/17.

- Examples of effective best practice sharing structures/mechanisms were identified, but these were often LA-LA level (for example through LACE coordinator steering groups) rather than facilitated by RECs. Most best practice sharing appeared to be largely informal or ad-hoc.

5. Policy Setting

5.1 This section presents evidence on:

- The extent to which policy priorities are clearly set out each year, are timely and are understood and agreed by all partners; and

- Whether policy priorities are regularly reviewed in line with Welsh Government policy, the wider evidence base and monitoring and evaluation of spend.

Assessment of policy priorities

National level priorities

5.2 REC and LA staff and wider stakeholder groups were generally clear about the aims and objectives of the grant and agreed with national level priorities outlined in guidance documents. However, one LACE coordinator felt that the initial information on priorities was unclear:

> "The one thing, if I was feeding back to Welsh Government, is that it would have been easier for us if the messages to local authorities had been clearer… we have had since very clear letters, a very clear steer on how we should spend the money, but it didn't come initially, and then it allows for this push and pull to happen, and that just wastes time. So for us, clarity on messaging to local authorities would have been, and will continue to be, an issue for funding". (LACE Coordinator)

5.3 Stakeholder organisations working with LAC, foster parents and adopted children welcomed the separation of the grant to focus on the specific needs of LAC and the broadening of the target group to cover adopted and foster children, children with special guardianship orders and previously LAC:

> "The grant was originally set up for low income families, free school meals equals the PDG. That is totally fair and there is no argument. But, as I said, our children [LAC] are not deprived in the same way, they may not be deprived financially, though many are, our children are emotionally deprived. School is stressful for our children; they have problems with attachment, concentration, lots of things" (Stakeholder organisation representative).

5.4 National stakeholder organisations were happy that the funding should be prioritised to improve the consistency of educational support for LAC across Wales and felt that a better understanding of trauma and attachment among all school staff should be the overall strategic aim. All interviewees welcomed a more strategic approach to

grant funding, although many stressed the importance of ensuring a balanced approach. While a coherent regional approach was believed to be necessary, there were some misguided concerns that it was not available to address the individual needs of each child.

> "PDG LAC needs to be considered as a wellbeing intervention as part of a whole school strategy…so we can't give money to each child individually. And there is not enough money to make an impact this way" (REC lead).

5.5 Two REC leads said that Welsh Government priorities had become much clearer in the last two years and this has improved alignment between REC and LA-level strategies. One REC lead also felt that the Welsh Government has now made it clearer in the last two years that the grant is a school improvement grant which has helped to improve school-level buy-in.

5.6 However, a few interviewees reported several improvements they would like to see regarding national level priorities and the way they are communicated:

- One REC lead felt that the Welsh Government could better clarify that the grant change was a national model and not just individual RECs 'stealing money';

- One REC lead and approximately a quarter of LACE coordinators would like clearer guidance from the Welsh Government regarding the types of activity that can be funded by the grant. While some of them felt this provided too much flexibility, others felt that there was not enough flexibility to allow them to meet the specific needs of children in their LA.

- A few REC, LA and school level stakeholders felt that the Welsh Government could be clearer about who is covered by the funding as the guidance is currently being interpreted differently across RECs and LAs. Most stakeholder organisations interviewed also wanted the target group to be broadened to include all vulnerable children, although LACE coordinators raised concerns that the pot of money per LAC was already decreasing given the broader range of young people it was now supposed to support:

  > "It's really difficult to say no to a pupil because they don't quite fit the criteria. We should support all pupils but I understand the difficulties for this with the funding we have. We need a whole new conversation with the Welsh Government on this because it's a can of worms" (LACE coordinator).

  > "I think the more that we can tie that money to children who have a high level of adverse experiences rather than to children who are in one particular form of

permanency, you know, just to keep moving it back to 'this is not about being adopted, it's not about being looked after, it's about your early childhood experiences and how that impacts on your ability to learn', that's what we want this grant to address" (LACE coordinator).

- Several stakeholders felt that the grant was too focussed on improving educational outcomes without considering improvements in wellbeing. While Welsh Government guidance makes it clear that the grant is not solely focussed on directly improving educational outcomes, required outcome measures do focus on attainment and attendance; and

- There was some confusion among LAs about how children who move away from the LA should be supported, particularly those who move in or out of Wales, and there is currently mixed practice at LA level. While Welsh Government guidance[69] clearly states that funding must not follow the child out of county, some LAs said they were still funding out of county pupils.

REC and LA priorities

5.7   At REC level, the priorities included in support plans varied in their level of clarity. An assessment of support plans shows that priorities were generally better reported in 2017/18: most RECs had a bullet pointed list of key priorities, rather than longer sections of text. However, REC-level interviews generally confirmed alignment of REC-level priorities across RECs, and with national priorities. All REC strategies focussed on raising attainment and attendance, reducing exclusions, enhancing curriculum opportunities and supporting the wider wellbeing needs and social and emotional development of LAC as desired outcomes.

5.8   To achieve these outcomes, all RECs' plans stressed a focus on ensuring a more strategic and sustainable approach to support, and highlighted the importance of training to ensure all staff working with LAC are sufficiently aware of attachment issues and how to better support the needs of LAC. RECs' plans also highlighted a focus on building school capacity to improve the educational outcomes of LAC, building effective partnerships and improving collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders across the region, developing mechanisms for better best practice sharing, improving monitoring and evaluation systems and making better use of data. GwE also had a further objective to improve placement and school stability to keep

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[69] Welsh Government, November 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant to support the educational attainment of looked after children: Frequently asked questions*

children in North Wales for wellbeing, linguistic and cultural reasons, while CSC in 2016/17 had a key priority to ensure the participation of LAC to inform strategic approaches and operational decision making.

5.9   REC leads said that, given their agreement of priorities, they would like to move to a national model for priority and target setting:

"The regional leads had an honest discussion with WG…and the four of us strongly believe in the same things, that this grant is entirely to do with the wellbeing of children, so why can't we, after our period of development, have a national model?" (REC lead).

"Looked After Children need to have that drilling down of what we're doing in a tailored, bespoke way for them, but on the other hand, it should be part of a whole-school, wellbeing strategy that ensures safety, and inclusivity that all school children should feel" (REC lead).

5.10   At LA level, there is limited evidence of local level plans/priorities. One LA in ERW provided a clear local level plan outlining priorities, expected spend for activities, and outcome measures for both years. CSC and EAS's regional spending plans for 2015/16 also contained spending plans for each LA laying out priorities, activities, estimated spend and outcome measures, although figures for planned spend per activity were not consistently reported, particularly in EAS. It is unclear whether other LAs have produced local level plans and, if so, of what quality and level of detail.

5.11   Despite a lack of clear documentary evidence, findings from LACE coordinator interviews suggest that LA-level priorities largely align with REC level priorities:

"We're very lucky in [this region] that the five LACEs, we are on the same page. We really do agree most of the time. We would sit down and we discussed the parameters of what was acceptable and what was not and then we all agreed to follow roughly the same model – and it worked. So as long as we were able to put the money against attendance, attainment, behaviour or a specific 'other', then it was acceptable" (LACE coordinator, EAS).

5.12   Given the variation in governance arrangements and the relative flexibility allowed to LAs in developing local plans, some variations were identified in proposed activities to achieve REC level outcomes. For example, a focus on streamlining Personal Education Plan (PEP) processes in one LA and a focus on developing nurture groups and an LA-wide nurture approach in two neighbouring LAs. There are also mixed views between LAs on the proportion of funding that should be used for individual

pupil bursary support. However, where slight variations in priorities existed, LAs felt that they were responses to the specific needs of their area:

> "We still have the school and local-based flexibility to use the funds and not just money going at regional level and not impacting locally. It feels this is the best of both systems so we have coordinated regional training and also fair access to training and local reflective funding based on individuals' needs" (LACE coordinator, GwE)

5.13   Most school-level respondents felt that local and regional plans aligned with local authority priorities (75 per cent and 69 per cent respectively), and most disagreed or strongly disagreed that regional and local plans did not align with school priorities (66 per cent for both) (Figure 5.1: and Figure 5.2:). They also felt regional plans generally took into account Welsh Government guidance and current research and/or best practice, although findings were less positive for local plans. Only 17 per cent of school level respondents felt activities in LA strategies reflected evidence of what works and 42 per cent felt they reflected prior school spend. Over a third of respondents were not aware (did not know) if plans/strategies at either a regional or local level reflected previous spending or evidence of best practice.

Figure 5.1: Awareness of regional strategy/plan
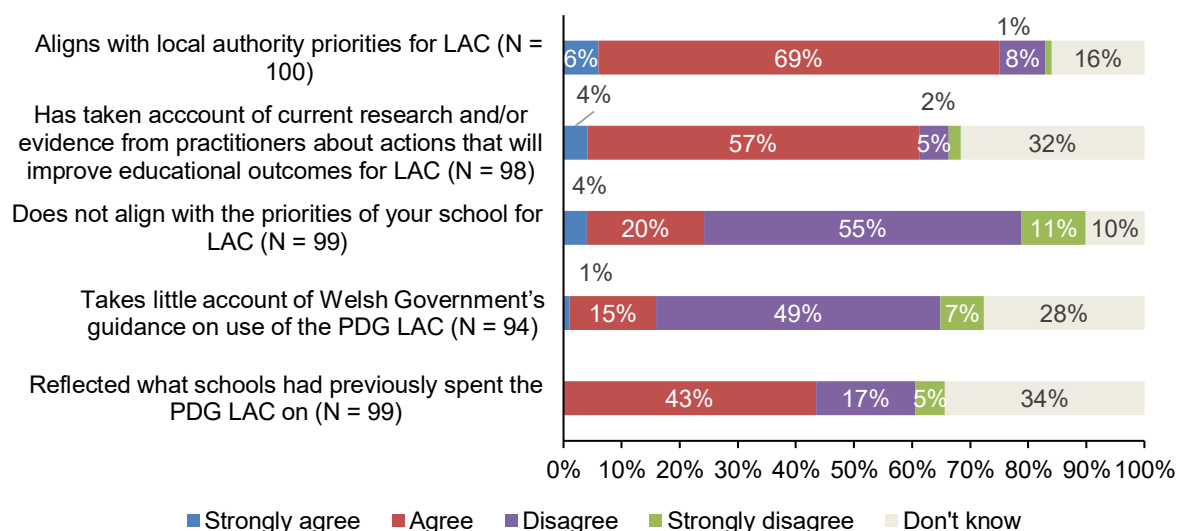
Base: Respondents aware of regional strategy/plan, N = 102. Non-response is excluded and varied per statement (2-8).

Figure 5.2: Awareness of local strategy/plan
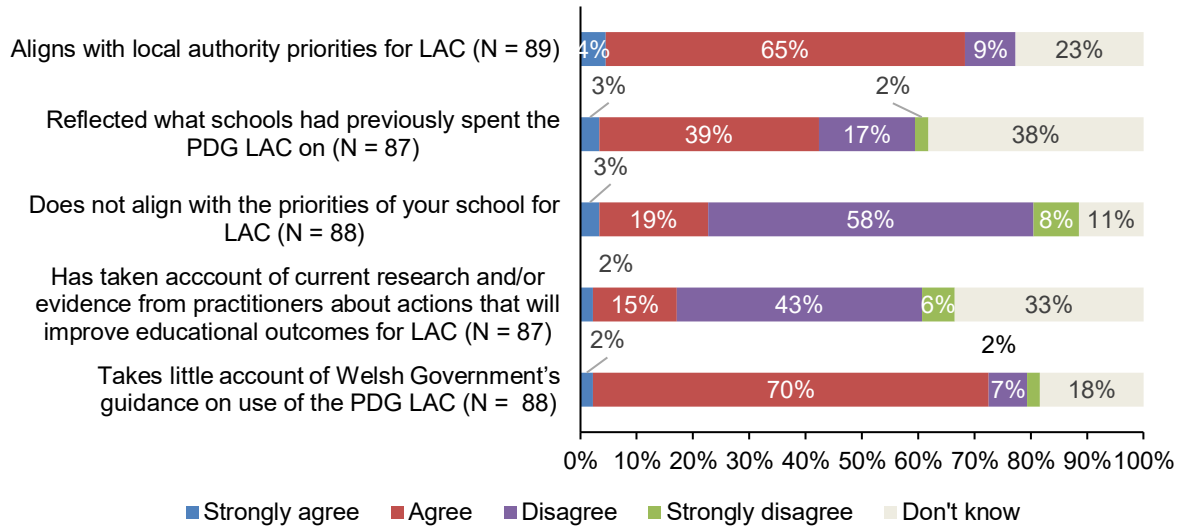
Base: Respondents aware of regional strategy/plan, N = 92. Non-response is excluded and varied per statement (3-5).

5.14 Alignment of REC level priorities and cluster priorities were less clear, although most interviewees commenting on cluster arrangements reported large variations in the content and quality of cluster bids. For example, LACEs in EAS reported that a few head teachers had raised concerns about a lack of clarity around bidding processes, priorities and the types of activities for which they could apply for funding.

Reviewing and updating priorities

5.15 REC and LA priorities over the period generally remained the same, however there was an increasing focus in the second year on building school capacity through school-to-school and cluster working in EAS, CSC and GwE. In contrast, ERW focussed on building school capacity through the recruitment of LA level staff in both years, to provide strategic and tailored support to schools and support the training and upskilling of school staff. One LA reported reducing the proportion of bursary allocations in the second year to facilitate a more strategic approach and another moved from a focus on upskilling to embedding existing work. At regional level, ERW also reported a similar move away from awareness raising towards embedding existing learning:

> "At the start it was about awareness-raising, and we have done that now, and so we have to do something else. The next bit is getting schools to grow on their own and embed their learning" (REC level stakeholder, ERW).

5.16 All four RECs reported updating plans on the basis of prior spend and clarification of Welsh Government priorities:

- GwE said that the LAs met regionally as part of quarterly spending reviews to provide key findings which GwE then collated and used to update priorities, however not all LAs attended these meetings;

- CSC reported that after each year's bursary allocations, the REC lead and LACE coordinators would meet to discuss learning from the activities funded before the next round of funding;

- EAS reported mapping spend for 2014/15 to support the development of their 2015/16 plan and, in 2016, conducted a review using their FADE (focus, activity, do, evaluate) system and involving LAs to assess what had worked well and where consistency was lacking; and

- ERW reported refining plans after a 2015/16 spending review, a direct consultation to capture the views of LAC and training evaluations. They also went through quarterly spend again for this funding year to identify the types of activities funded and to ensure they were in line with plans.

5.17 However, there was limited evidence of any systematic revision processes and it was not clear what information was collected and how it was then used to systematically feed into future planning.

5.18 At LA level, at least two LAs in GwE and one LA in ERW reported updating their plans for monitoring and evaluation of spend.

> "We're learning as we go along as we need to constantly revise our plan in an iterative way. We want to learn from everyone else and share what we've done with others" (LACE coordinator, ERW)

> "We have a designated LAC teacher forum meeting at the end of every term, we look at what funding was used for, who did we use it for, how [did we use it] and how effective[ly]?" (LACE coordinator, GwE)

Key summary points

5.19 This section found that:

- REC and LA staff and national stakeholder groups generally understood the national aims and objectives of the grant set out by the Welsh Government and agreed with national level priorities, identifying grant changes and objectives as

necessary and timely. Given overall agreement of priorities, REC leads would like to move to a national model for priority and target setting.

- However, LA staff and national stakeholder groups often suggested that the Welsh Government could better clarify that the introduction of the PDG LAC and the requirement for funding to be held at regional level was a national policy decision; provide clearer guidance on the types of activity that can be funded and which young people are covered by the funding; clarify whether wider wellbeing outcomes should be considered alongside educational attainment; and provide greater clarity on how children who move in or out of Wales should be supported by the grant.

- Regional and local level priorities and plans were generally aligned, however, some differences were identified in the types of planned activities, particularly at LA level. Where slight variations existed, LAs felt that they were necessary to address the specific needs of their population.

- Alignment of REC level priorities and cluster priorities were less clear; most interviewees commenting on cluster arrangements reported large variations in the content and quality of cluster bids.

- Priorities over the period generally remained the same, although the second year focussed more on embedding learning from the first year, building school capacity through promoting cluster working and working more strategically.

- All four RECs reported updating plans after monitoring and evaluating spend, reviewing and discussing priorities in line with Welsh Government policy, and in some cases, updating priorities and plans on the basis of the wider evidence base, best practice findings and evaluation results. However, there was limited evidence of any systematic revision processes.

- At LA level, three LAs reported updating plans on the basis of monitoring and evaluation of spend. Survey respondents in schools felt that regional plans generally took into account Welsh Government guidance and current research and/or best practice, however this was less the case for local plans.

6.   Allocation

6.1   This section presents findings to assess whether:

- Spending decisions and their rationale reflect identified needs and take account of evidence of what works;

- Spending choices are in line with REC policy and good practice;

- All allocations have costings, budgets, expected outputs, outcomes and targets; and

- Grants are used in line with plan expectations (in terms of process, budget and outputs) and good practice.

6.2   These are considered following a detailed analysis of the allocation process and the activities allocated grant funding in each REC.

Overview of spending allocations

Funding delegation for allocation decisions

6.3   Table 6.1: below outlines the levels (REC, LA, school) to which RECs delegated grant funding for decisions about allocations. Variations in approach were identified across RECs and years, and within some regions. It shows that:

- All RECs retained some funding for LAs (in 2015/16) and two retained some funding for LAs in 2016/17 (not EAS or CSC);

- All RECs provided funding to schools; some directly (GwE in both years, CSC and EAS 2016/17), and some through LA funding (CSC and EAS 2015/16, GwE and ERW); and

- Some RECs provided funding to individual schools (CSC in both years, EAS in 2015/16) and some to school clusters (GwE in both years, EAS in 2016/17).

6.4   In addition to the variations in allocation structure, interviewees highlighted differences in approach to determine funding allocations for LAs. Although the Welsh Government used SSIA data to allocate the grants to RECs[70], when determining LA level or school level allocations, ERW, CSC and EAS (in 2016/17) used PLASC data to determine total LAC numbers to use in their allocation formulae. In 2015/16, EAS

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[70] Welsh Government, November 2015. *Pupil Deprivation Grant to support the educational attainment of looked after children: Frequently asked questions.*

asked LACE coordinators to provide the REC with the LAC numbers for their LA but it is unclear how each LA calculated this figure.

6.5   All RECs used a formula not a bidding approach for funding allocations to LAs (although findings from one LACE coordinator interview suggest that in 2016/17 CSC may have allowed LAs to bid for some funding (the rest was allocated to schools)). Bidding was more commonly used for school funding allocations by both RECs and LAs, although some LAs in ERW reported holding all the money at LA level and funding school-level interventions or individual bursaries through these LA funds (i.e. no money was provided directly to schools). One of the ERW LAs provided formula funding to schools and another sought bids.

Table 6.1: Funding processes by REC

	CSC		EAS		ERW	GwE
REC level allocation	Grant funding allocated to each REC based on their number of LAC. Grant funding top-sliced to provide REC-level activities.					
Year	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16	2016/17	2015/16 and 2016/17	2015/16 and 2016/17
LA level allocation	Remaining funding provided to LAs – majority passed to schools		Remaining funding provided to LAs		Remaining funding provided to LAs. Three LAs hold all funding at LA level and use in schools based on identified need (no bidding process).	Almost all money provided to school/clusters via a bidding process overseen by LACE teams; LA's received small amount of funding directly for bursary allocations for individual pupils and local priorities, networking and Out of Wales learners.
School level allocation	Schools submit funding requests to LA; one LA allocates funding based on pupil tracker data	Schools submit funding requests to REC: LAs support school and cluster bids	Schools submit funding requests to LA.	School cluster leads submit funding requests to REC; mixed LA involvement in REC assessment panels	In one LA, schools with 5+ LAC are allocated £450 per pupil; one LA allows school bids for bursary funding.	School clusters submit funding requests to LA panels. Schools submit small bursary requests for individual pupils to LAs.

6.6   Table 6.2: summarises the funding held at each level, for both years. The percentage of funding held at REC level increased slightly in CSC, ERW and EAS between 2015/16 and 2016/17; the largest increase was in CSC (from 2 per cent to 10 per cent). In 2015/16 all remaining money was delegated to LAs, however EAS LAs allocated most of their allocation to schools (about 75 per cent). CSC LAs kept approximately two thirds of funding and ERW LAs held the majority (over three quarters) of funding.

6.7   In 2016/17, ERW arrangements remained the same. It is not clear whether the increase in the percentage of funding held at LA level in the second year is due to poor data or whether it reflects a decrease in bursary funding in schools, although one LA did report that they reduced bursary funding in the second year in favour of a more strategic approach at LA level. In contrast, EAS and CSC allocated all of, or the large majority of, funding directly to schools through REC-level funding applications. CSC provided some money to LAs for Out of Wales learners.

6.8   No data was provided for GwE but interviewees confirmed that GwE took a mixed approach to funding over both years. A small proportion of funding was held at REC level, while the majority was offered to school clusters on the basis of bids. A small proportion of funding was also given directly to LAs to provide bursary funding for individual students, and for spending on LA priorities.

Table 6.2: Estimated funding allocations

Year		Total REC allocation	Per cent retained at REC level	Per cent provided to LAs	Per cent provided directly to schools	Per cent retained at LA level	Per cent provided to schools by LA
2015/16	EAS	761,250	6	94	0	32[71]	73
	ERW	1,150,800	7	93	0	78[72]	22
	GwE	661,500	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
	CSC	1,347,150	2	98	0	65[73]	36
2016/17	EAS	727,950	12	0	89	0	0
	ERW	1,068,350	7	93	0	91	9
	GwE	671,600	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
	CSC	1,302,950	10	2	87	100	0

Source: Spending spreadsheets submitted by RECs and LAs and documentary evidence from Welsh Government, RECs and LAs.

[71] Figures for Blaenau Gwent were not available and data for Caerphilly and Newport are based on spend information provided in documentary evidence. As a result, total figures for retained and allocated spend at LA level do not sum to 100%.

[72] Figures for Carmarthenshire (planned spend), Ceredigion (planned spend), Pembrokeshire (actual spend) and Swansea (planned spend) are based on figures taken from documentary evidence so should be interpreted with caution.

[73] Figures for Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff are based on planned spend from documentary evidence so should be interpreted with caution.

6.9   All RECs allocated some funding to pay for REC leadership and management. This generally covered the direct costs of the REC leads. All RECs also used regional funding to provide behaviour and attachment awareness training to teachers and other stakeholders. For example, ERW used funding for attachment awareness training and work to engage teachers and schools in such training; GwE offered teacher training programmes focussing on leading behaviour change and raising awareness of attachment issues (e.g. training provided by Pivotal Education, Yellow Kite and Braveheart); EAS offered attachment and behaviour training to teachers, governors, foster carers, voluntary agency staff, post-16 college staff, alternative curriculum providers and youth services; and CSC offered training for school staff including mental health and wellbeing training focussing on attachment awareness, behaviour change run by Pivotal Education, and Geese Theatre Company , and PALAC training to support professional learning and development[74].

6.10   A very small proportion of funding was also used for networking and best practice sharing activities in CSC, ERW and GwE and supporting improved monitoring and evaluation. For example, GwE used funding to improve networking opportunities for teachers and to develop a more collective approach to monitoring spend and outcomes data, evaluation and decision-making. CSC reported some spend on "other support" including what was described as project support and regional LACE meetings, while EAS said that any networking work was funded through the allocation for REC level training and monitoring work was funded through the REC lead role without making it clear what this activity was. Funding proportions generally changed little between years, except for CSC, which increased the funding used for training in the second year. The broad allocation is summarised in 0 below.

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[74] Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC) is a knowledge exchange programme that seeks to promote evidence-informed practice in schools and support professional learning and development in schools.

Table 6.3: REC level spend by activity type

	2015/16				2016/17			
	CSC	EAS	ERW	GwE	CSC	EAS	ERW	GwE
REC lead	£10,593 (32%)	£17,000 (36%)	£60,000 (80%)		£29,432 (22%)	£33,000 (40%)	£60,000 (80%)	
Training	£19,279 (59%)	£30,000 (64%)	£15,000 (20%)		£102,461 (76%)	£50,000 (60%)	£13,000 (17%)	
Networking/best practice sharing	£1,111 (3%)	0%	0%		0%	0%	£2,000 (3%)	
Other	£1,852 (6%)	0%	0%		£2,953 (2%)	0%	0%	

Source: Funding spreadsheets

LA and school level allocations

6.11 Tables 6.4 to 6.7 in this section summarise the information received from documentary evidence, returned funding spreadsheets and interviews about the LAs and schools in each REC. Funding allocations have been included where available although for the reasons outlined above regarding the availability of complete records these figures should be interpreted with caution. Differences between RECs have been highlighted where possible.

6.12 Across Wales:

- Only three LAs reported using funding to improve monitoring and evaluation systems and processes (one in ERW and two in CSC), however some monitoring and evaluation work was carried out using in-kind resources or by staff recruited by LAs using PDG LAC funding;

- Almost all (20 out of 22) LAs across all four RECs reported using LA funding to deliver training (in addition to REC level training provision) on a variety of topics covering attachment awareness, behavioural issues and relationship-based play, for example;

- Just over half (12 out of 22) of LAs provided evidence of funding LAC support staff, however there were large variations in the proportion/amounts of funding used for staff between REC areas. While additional staff accounted for most of the LA allocation in ERW, LAs in GwE did not use any money for LA level staff;

- Just under half of LAs (10) across all four RECs reported using funding for best practice sharing activities. Two LAs also mentioned what would appear to be best

practice sharing activities, but it is unclear whether the work was funded in-kind or through the grant;

- Almost all (20) LAs reported providing direct support to LAC: it is likely that the two other LAs did provide support but did not report it. Eight LAs reported delivering LA-wide interventions for LAC including mentoring schemes and local youth group projects. Other support for LAC included nurture group provision, support with transition to/from secondary school (e.g. college placements and visits), academic tuition, alternative curriculum packages, delivery of resources (e.g. laptop lending schemes), literacy and numeracy interventions, sports activities and school clubs, residential trips, and behaviour and counselling support; and

- Nine LAs (in ERW, GwE and CSC) reported funding "other" activities. These included funding for Out of Wales learners and in some cases, unexplained additional costs.

6.13 Less information was available on the activities funded through cluster or school bids. In EAS in 2016/17, such funding was used for training, staff recruitment and individual pupil support. However, there was no evidence of funding for monitoring or evaluation work or networking and best practice sharing activities. In CSC in 2016/17, there is evidence of funding for training, individual support for LAC, networking and monitoring work and staff recruitment in schools.

EAS

6.14 In 2015/16, most of the grant was provided to schools by LAs, either via a bidding process or directly. Activities were funded in line with "the five 5 R's", as defined by EAS at regional level: remuneration (additional payments for staff), recruitment (additional staff in schools such as employing LAC mentors), restructure (changing the roles of staff), release (training support for relevant staff and for capacity building), resources (ICT, purchase of specialist courses). All LAs funded training and a range of direct support for LAC including whole school activities, after school clubs and individual student bursary support. Two LAs used funding for networking and best practice sharing activities and two used funding to recruit LA level support staff (Table 6.4:).

6.15 In 2016/17, funding was provided to school clusters directly from the REC. The allocations indicate £480,036 (74 per cent) was provided for 'capacity-building

activities'[75] including Thrive[76] training, nurture training[77], whole school projects, and the recruitment of support workers and family engagement officers. A total of £135,144 (21 per cent) was provided for 'pupil support' including tuition and emotional support.

6.16 EAS's January 2017 progress and highlight report to the Welsh Government showed that 542 pupils benefited from the grant and approximately 50 per cent of schools in the region.

6.17 Case studies provide further detail on school cluster level activities in 2016/17.

- In one LA, dedicated support staff for LAC were located in several secondary schools for the benefit of LAC in the cluster. These provided a mix of pastoral and academic support and a LAC tutor providing academic support. Case study interviewees reported that post-holders helped refer pupils to other support agencies as required and liaised with teachers and carers; helped LAC to develop life skills, build confidence and trust; provided homework tuition clubs and dedicated subject support to LAC before exams.

- In another, cross-cluster mentoring support was provided across five primary schools and one secondary school. The part-time LAC mentor provided mentoring, coaching and family support to approximately 20 students across the cluster schools. Each child received a 30 minute session every week.

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[75] Capacity building activities reported here are defined by EAS and include a much broader range of activities (e.g. training and whole school projects) than the capacity building definition used throughout the rest of this report.

[76] Training to support individuals to work in a targeted way with children and young people who have struggled with difficult life events. *Thrive Training*

[77] Nurture training supports teachers and other staff working with children to implement nurture groups and other activities to help children engage with missing early nurturing experiences and improve their social and emotional skills. *Nurture Training*

Table 6.4: Activities funded in EAS 2015/16, by LA

Category of spend	Activity type	LA 1	LA 2	LA 3	LA 4	LA 5
Strategic	Monitoring and evaluation					
Training	Training	"Large proportion" of funding for training e.g. Thrive	Trained Thrive practitioners to work across schools	ELSA training (£2,583)	Thrive training	£8,205
Building capacity in the system	Staff recruitment	Two mentors		Pastoral support staff (£14,377)		
	Networking/best practice sharing			PRU coordinator shared best practice on dealing with attachment (£11,025)		Secondment of staff from schools. PRU provided school to school work and sharing of best practice (£15,000)
Supporting LAC	LA-wide and whole school interventions/programmes for LAC, individual provision/bursary support	Nurture provision, transition support	Mentoring programmes for anger management; Cross-school nurture programmes	Individual pupil support e.g. equine therapy, transition support, tuition (£5,936); Funding for four schools and individual students at risk of exclusion (short term support and reintegration programmes) (£39,780)	Letterbox scheme; Tuition; LAC person in schools, training, resources, alternative curriculum packages	"Pupil initiatives" (no further information provided) (£5,000); allocation using regional pupil data and LA steering group for: mentoring; literacy, numeracy, social and emotional interventions; and individual pupil support (£168,851); music tuition, sports activities, college placements, residential trips (£16,500)

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ERW

6.18 ERW required LAs to focus on three types of funded activity: training and development, support staff and additional resources. ERW was the only REC to provide all LAs with allocations. In line with these allocations, all LAs funded cross-LA training, additional resources/bursary support and LA level support staff to deliver activities to schools across their areas. Most pupil-level support was organised and funded by these post-holders rather than distributed to schools (see Table 6.5:).

6.19 Interview and case study findings[78] highlighted the following roles and responsibilities of the funded support workers:

- Providing individual support to students including providing and/or arranging tutoring, exam invigilation, and pastoral support;

- Designing, organising and delivering training on a range of topics focussed around the needs of LAC;

- Supporting children at home, for example revision support;

- Supporting post-16 plans, organising trips, visits and courses;

- Building links with other services and providing advice and support to teachers.

6.20 One case study looked at the role of an education support officer funded at LA level who was responsible for arranging alternative curriculum provision and visits to colleges and learning events for LAC and previously LAC. Teachers felt they would be difficult to organise themselves as they did not have the necessary strategic oversight or the time to arrange visits and chase the return of consent forms for all pupils. The post-holder also conducted a lot of work with foster carers, ensuring that they were informed and aware of support being offered and ensuring they were upskilled to better support their child with their education; liaised closely with social services and mental health services to ensure the wider needs of children were met; and contributed to the evaluation and monitoring activities undertaken by the LACE coordinator's team on individual LAC.

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[78] Three case studies were conducted in ERW LAs: one case study looking at the role and impact of an LA level LAC mentor (interviews with three LA staff and two school staff); one study looking at the role and impact of a LAC education officer in one LA (interviews with 17 stakeholders including LA staff, the post-holder, foster carers, teachers, social workers and TAs), and one case study looking at the impact of relationship-based play training across one LA (17 interviews, as above).

Table 6.5: Activities funded in ERW in 2015/16 and 2016/17, by LA

Category of spend	Activity	LA 1	LA 2	LA 3	LA 4	LA 5	LA 6
Strategic	Monitoring and evaluation	Funded in-kind – LAC coordinator to embed systems and processes				£19,200 (2016/17 only)	
Training	Training	Attachment and relationship-based play training for whole schools and nurses, youth workers, welfare services; internal trainings for TAs (£42,700 in 2015/16; £89,220 in 2016/17)	LAC learning mentor to develop training (£5,396 in 2015/16)	Senco training in schools, relationship-based play training (£17,062 in 2015/16; £11,936 in 2016/17)	Attachment training run by educational psychologist for schools and individuals; training for foster carers.	Thrive and ELSA training (£18,000 in 2015/16; £13,000 in 2016/17)	Funding for project lead officer to plan/ audit training (£26,000 in 2015/16); designated LAC leads and headteachers attachment awareness training (£8,500 in 2016/17)
Building capacity in the system	Staff recruitment	£67,600 in 2015/16; £102,930 in 2016/17	1.5 Learning mentors (one half time in social services, other in education) (£31,744 in 2015/16; £34,521 in 2016/17)	Funding for staff to support pupils in schools, deliver training in schools; intervention programmes in schools and support for after school activities (£195,741 in 2015/16; £202,728 in 2016/17)	Educational psychologist – links with social care LAC service; LAC learning coaches (£45,400 in 2015/16; £69,740 in 2016/17)	Two education support officers offer assessments and one to one support, cascade training learnings to schools (£1000 in 2015/16; £10,000 in 2016/17)	Four project workers (£186,000 in 2015/16; £142,115 in 2016/17)
	Networking/best practice sharing	Teacher from leading school sharing attachment training learnings			Advocacy for LAC (£8,700 in 2015/16).		

Category of spend	Activity	LA 1	LA 2	LA 3	LA 4	LA 5	LA 6
					Virtual school for LAC		
Supporting LAC	LA-wide and whole school interventions/programmes for LAC, individual provision/bursary support	Commissioned local youth groups to run projects; Activities run by engagement workers for children at risk of exclusion, and alternative curriculum opportunities	Additional ad-hoc funding to support LAC for out of school provision and visits; schools with 5+ LAC allocated £450 per LAC	£11,155 (via support staff); tuition (£21,926 in 2015/16; £18, 244 in 2016/17); Learning support materials (£9,166 in 2015/16; £6,855 in 2016/17)	Bids through virtual school: Behaviour and counselling support, reading support, school counsellor	LA allocations based on need: TA hours, bespoke education packages (£86,880 in 2015/16; £64,961 in 2016/17)	Evening home tuition and resources.
Other	Other			Out of Wales learners (£10,000 in 2015/16; £5,000 in 2016/17)		£2000 in 2015/16, £5,000 in 2016/17 (no details provided)	Out of Wales learners (£15,000 in 2015/16; £9,200 in 2016/17)

GwE

6.21   GwE's regional plan indicated LA and school allocations for training and development and flexible bursary support for LAC pupils. Activities were funded in line with these priorities with all LAs providing flexible bursary support and all but one LA funding training and development opportunities (Table 6.6:). It is unclear whether LA-level reporting on bursary funding includes any cluster bids for funding as total bursary values appear small. No LA reported funding staff recruitment or monitoring and evaluation activities, although four reported delivering networking and best practice sharing work.

6.22   Case studies provide further detail on activities funded in LAs. One LA delivered training to school staff to develop nurture groups in primary schools to support LAC's social skills and overcome attachment difficulties. Building on the success of the first groups, training was repeated in other schools and with other staff. Two LAs are now ensuring all secondary schools become accredited in line with the national nurture award scheme. In another LA, one school pooled its individual student bursaries to design and deliver an equestrian club for LAC and other vulnerable learners aged 7 to 11 years which involved stable management, riding and horse care activities. After the initial success of the club, the LA expanded the work to include a cluster of primary schools across the LA.

Table 6.6: Activities funded in GwE in 2015/16 and 2016/17, by LA

Category of spend	Activity	LA 1	LA 2	LA 3	LA 4	LA 5	LA 6
Strategic	Monitoring and evaluation						
Training	Training	Pivotal attachment training and supply cover (£23,166 in 2015/16)	Pivotal and Train the Trainer (£20,000 in 2015/16); Emotional Literacy Support Assistant training in 2016/17	Yellow Kite attachment training with 20 staff in 2016/17.		Bereavement and mental health training for school network (£17,500 in 2015/16; £19, 995 in 2016/17)	Behaviour management and attachment, mental health and equal opportunities.
Building capacity in the system	Staff recruitment						
	Networking/best practice sharing	Networking in 2016/17 (£7,500)	Run at no cost			£77 in 2015/16; £2,937 in 2016/17.	Funding for designated LAC teacher forum in 2016/17 (£7,500).
Supporting LAC	LA-wide and whole school interventions/programmes for LAC, individual provision/bursary support	Narrative therapy (no more detail provided), nurture groups, personal stories DVD, learning resources, after school clubs, educational visits, overseas trips, music lessons	Lego club for year 6-7 transition (£5,000 in both years), equestrian clubs; Individual bursaries (£12,600 in 2016/17)	Almost all money used for bursary funding: school training, tutoring support, wellbeing interventions, nurture groups, summer schools, transition activities and developing calm areas in schools	Laptop borrowing scheme; almost all money is used as bids for bursary funding.	Therapy and laptop lending programme (£7,529 in 2015/16; £2,110 in 2016/17); schools bursary (£2,121 in 2015/16; £34,545 in 2016/17)	Social and emotional therapy project in 2016/17.
Other	Other	Out of Wales learners (£7,350 in 2015/16)	Out of Wales learners (£7,282 in 16/17)			Grant administration (£3,000 2015/16)	Out of Wales learners (£11,500 2016/17)

CSC

6.23   In 2015/16 funding was provided to LAs (Table 6.7:). LAs funded a range of activities including monitoring and evaluation work, training, staff support, and networking as well as delivering flexible support to schools and students. For example:

- Monitoring: one LA spent nearly £40,000 on devising and implementing a termly tracking spreadsheet for LAC in schools (although the content and exact purpose of the spreadsheet is unclear from documentary evidence);

- Guidance: two LAs spent approximately £30,000[79] to co-produce a booklet to support schools to better meet the needs of LAC and other vulnerable children. Having previously put together a booklet on autism spectrum disorder, the partnership commissioned Cardiff University to design a booklet for a wide range of stakeholders on how to best support LAC and then delivered training sessions in schools across both LAs using the material in the booklet;

- Training: four of five LAs delivered LA level training. One LA funded a two year Thrive training licence in 2015/16 with funding in 2016/17 for continuing professional development to keep Thrive practitioner skills up-to-date (£45,000 estimated total spend). The LA trained a few individuals within different LA teams who work with LAC as well as two members of staff from each school cluster (a total of 23 individuals). Thrive practitioners in schools undertake pupil assessments and arrange flexible support on the basis of identified needs, undertake assessments in foster homes; and share information with other school staff about approaches, concepts and terminology to upskill the school as a whole.

6.24   In 2016/17 funded activities are unclear as funding was allocated to schools directly by the REC and limited information on the activities supported by the funding was available. Findings from case studies undertaken as part of this report and internal case studies produced by schools in CSC provide further detail of 2016/17 activities funded at school level using regional funds. All activities appear to have been funded in individual schools rather than in school clusters. Examples include:

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[79] The total value reported by case study interviewees varies from the values reported by LACE coordinators in the table below.

- Employing a TA in a primary school to provided individual emotional and academic support, therapeutic cooking sessions and drop-in breakfast and lunch clubs which focussed on improving social skills and emotional attachment;

- A paired reading project in two primary schools;

- Using the Speech Language and Communication Framework (SLCF) as an audit tool and supporting social and emotional development through LEGO therapy in a secondary school;

- Implementing a mentoring programme for six students to improve ambition and learning proactivity in a secondary school;

- Developing pupil voice work through delivering attachment training to school staff and organising "hot chocolate" meetings where LAC could discuss concerns with teachers;

- Work to support two primary schools' LAC pupils with transition to secondary school;

- Delivering a course on Fostering and Enhancing Emotional Literacy to secondary school staff;

- Running "TALKABOUT" groups in a primary school to foster relationship building.

Table 6.7: Activities funded in CSC in 2015/16, by LA

Category of spend	Activity	LA 1	LA 2	LA 3	LA 4	LA 5
Strategic	Monitoring and evaluation	Achievement for All (no further detail provided) (£77,000)	Devise and use termly tracking spreadsheet for schools (£39,770)			
Training	Training	Thrive training (£45,271)		Geese Theatre attachment training and foster carer education training (£13,017)	£8,772	Termly designated teacher training sessions, training for foster carers, "decoding education" to raise awareness of school strategy and how to interpret information from schools
Building capacity in the system	Staff recruitment	Two Thrive practitioners – conduct assessments and work with foster carers (£46,462)	Two learning mentors – one for transition support (cut in 2016/17), one primarily for KS4 to keep children in school; 0.6 FTE educational psychologist for school or home support (not in 2016/17) (£117,271)	Staff member recruited to deliver tuition and write and deliver training packages (£27,549)	£35,033	
	Networking/best practice sharing		Termly LAC designated Teacher Forum (£894)	CLA Friendly Schools Resource (Educational Psychologist input to produce resource and printing/translation costs) (£12,324)	CLA friendly schools resource (£7,014)	
Supporting LAC	LA-wide and whole school interventions/programmes for LAC, individual provision/bursary support		Pupil tuition for KS4; rapid and bespoke support to schools; attachment aware focussed activities, Lego clubs, emotional literacy activities.	Pupil tuition (£3,227)	Literacy project (£31,858); £58,838 bursary funding	
Other	Other	£10,187 (no details)		Training resources and pupil voice engagement (£5,009)		

School level spending

6.25 School-level survey responses provide some additional information on the types of activity funded at school level through bursary allocations (Figure 6.1:). In total, 113 respondents (72 per cent) said they received funding in either 2015/16 or 2016/17, or both years. More respondents received funding in the second year (56 per cent).
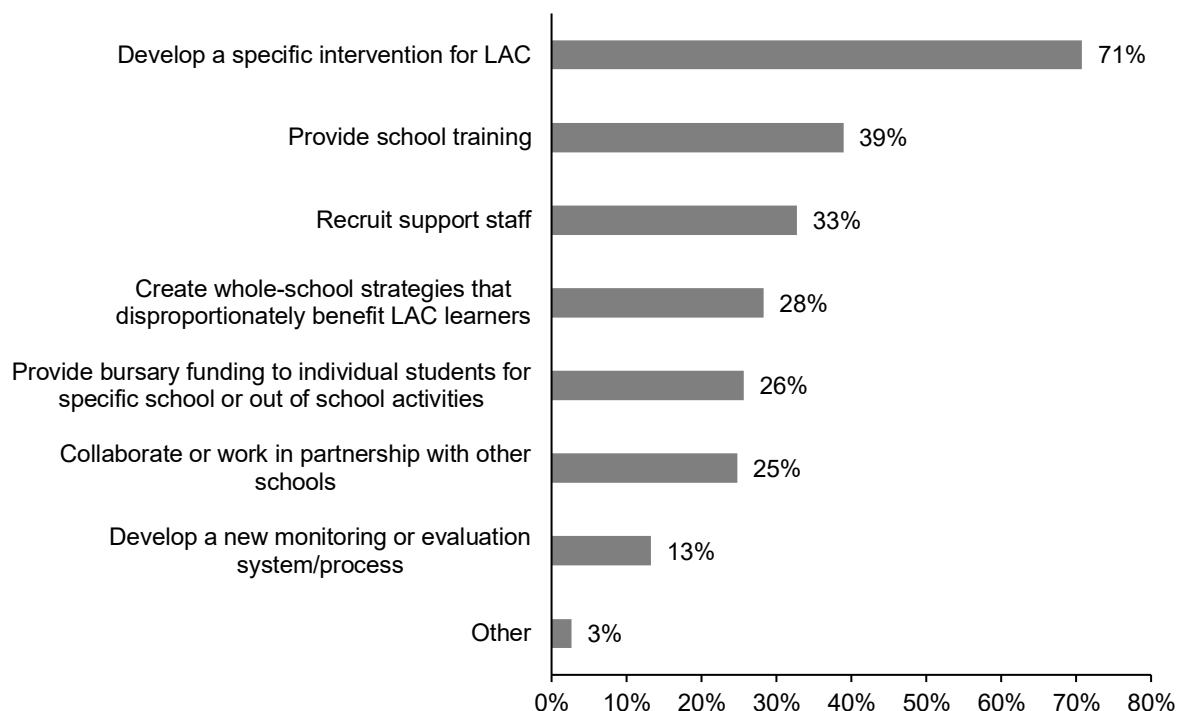
Figure 6.1: Proportion of respondents receiving grant funding by year
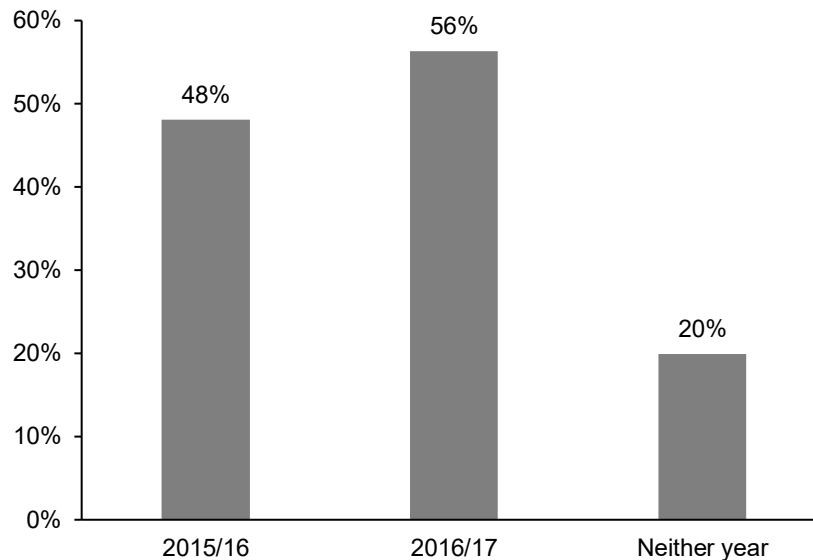
Base: All respondents who responded about grant funding (N = 181). Non-response: 38 responses (excluded).

6.26 Most respondents who received grant funding in either or both years used it to develop a specific intervention for LAC (71 per cent) (Figure 6.2:). This was followed by provision of school training (39 per cent) and recruiting support staff (33 per cent): again, there was no change between years. The biggest changes in where spend was directed were in collaborating or working in partnership with other schools (ten respondents selected this for 2015/16, compared to 22 for 2016/17) and developing a new monitoring and/or evaluation system/process (three responses in 2015/16 and ten in 2016/17).

Figure 6.2: Overall use of PDG LAC funding

Develop a specific intervention for LAC — 71%
Provide school training — 39%
Recruit support staff — 33%
Create whole-school strategies that disproportionately benefit LAC learners — 28%
Provide bursary funding to individual students for specific school or out of school activities — 26%
Collaborate or work in partnership with other schools — 25%
Develop a new monitoring or evaluation system/process — 13%
Other — 3%

Base: All respondents who received grant funding (N = 113). Tick all that apply.

6.27 However, when asked to provide general feedback on their perceptions of the grant, interviewees and survey respondents felt there were large variations in the types of activity being funded by the grant across different LAs and schools.

Funding processes

6.28 Interviewees said that late disbursement of funding significantly affected their ability to plan, deliver and evaluate activities after a bidding process during the financial year, although only a quarter of school survey respondents stated that the current process/processes for obtaining funding is/are harder and less efficient than pre-2015 (Figure 6.3:). This is roughly equivalent to the proportion of respondents (21 per cent) who said it was easier and more efficient than pre-2015. Notably, 18 per cent did not notice a difference, and 36 per cent of respondents did not know.

Figure 6.3: Perceptions on current process for obtaining grant funding
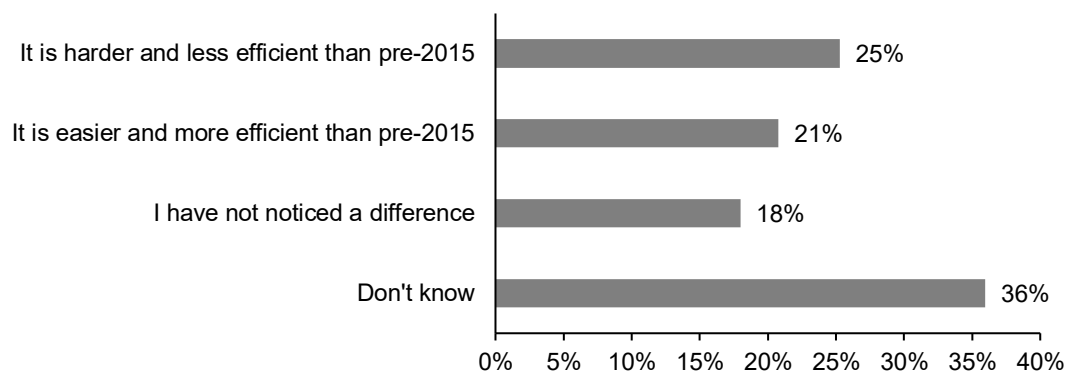
Base: All respondents aware of the PDG-LAC funding, N = 219 (178 responses, 41 non-responses which are excluded).

6.29 When given the opportunity to provide further comments at the end of the school stakeholder survey, almost all comments related to issues with funding processes. Key issues included:

- Funding timelines – respondents highlighted late funding allocations, limited time for putting together funding bids and short funding periods making it hard to plan any longer-term interventions;

- Support with applications and funding – respondents expressed a lack of support/information when applying for funding and when trying to identify previously LAC or using PLASC data to identify LAC. One respondent also mentioned that they did not receive the correct level of funding and did not get the right level of support to resolve this;

- Problems with the broader funding system – most respondents providing additional comments mentioned difficulties or concerns they had with the funding system and in turn how effective they felt it was for improving outcomes for LAC. The majority of those who commented called for a more localised approach to funding (e.g. direct funding to schools based on numbers of LAC or through the LA). Respondents also felt that cluster working needed improving e.g. ensuring cluster agreement prior to bids being made or making the cluster bid process more efficient.

6.30 Some respondents provided suggestions for how funding processes could be improved including: weighting funding for LAC based on the level of LA deprivation, raising more awareness or improving communication about the PDG LAC to help

schools use the money effectively (and apply in the first place) and more clearly extending the funding to pupils who were formerly LAC.

Spending decisions and rationales

6.31   This section explores the extent to which spending decisions and rationales reflect evidence of need and what works and the extent they were in line with REC policy and good practice.

6.32   Comparing spending to activities outlined in Welsh Government guidance specific to the PDG LAC, the majority of allocated funding identified appears to be in line with grant requirements. It is evident from tables outlining spending per activity reported above that the grant was used to recruit a REC lead and deliver targeted and flexible interventions that support the educational attainment and wider holistic needs of LAC and previously LAC. A small amount of funding was also used to improve networking and best practice systems, in line with guidance. However, some funding was used, for example to recruit TAs in schools and LA LAC support workers, which was not recommended in wider PDG guidance.

6.33   Similarly, at REC level, LA and school-level spend appears to be in line with general REC-level guidance and priorities. However, it is not always possible to assess the alignment of school bursary funding and cluster bids with REC level priorities given the lack of clear spend and monitoring information available.

REC and LA level funding decisions

6.34   At REC and LA level, there is some evidence from interviews of REC and LA staff drawing on evidence of need to inform funding allocations. While the content and format of bids is unclear, where RECs or LAs require schools to submit funding requests, it appears that almost all require schools to provide some information on identified needs. For example, one LA in GwE requires schools to submit a one-page document detailing the provision of current support, bids are then assessed by REC and/or LA level staff, however it is again unclear how, and how rigorously, this information is assessed. In ERW, where all funding was held at LA level, LACE coordinators and funded support staff reported regular interactions with young people and school staff to identify and understand individual needs. One LA in ERW also mentioned that Independent Reviewing Officers or Social workers often identify specific needs of young people and refer into the LACE's team for support.

6.35   The education coordinator case study in ERW provides a good example of a model that successfully identified and supported the needs of LAC. All stakeholders, including school staff and foster carers felt that having a strong LA team in place with capacity to support not only students but staff in addressing children's needs was the most effective use of the grant funding. The team had frequent and direct contact with LAC so were aware of their individual needs but had strong theoretical expertise and knowledge of the evidence base to successfully implement and recommend successful interventions. School staff felt that this model provided added value over and above what they could provide themselves, describing the team as a "fresh pair of eyes" able to suggest new and effective ways of working with their young people that they wouldn't have the time to research themselves.

6.36   While interviewees acknowledged the role of RECs in facilitating a more strategic approach to funding, LA level interviewees and school level survey respondents felt that RECs were too far removed from LAC to properly understand their needs and target interventions appropriately. LACE coordinators felt that need was best addressed at LA level, in collaboration with schools as they were able to provide both targeted and strategic support. The most recent evaluation of the PDG[80] concluded that there is a need for RECs to better understand the different needs within their region.

6.37   There is some evidence that funding decisions at REC and LA level were based in part on published evidence of what works and in part on what was perceived to be best practice. For example, the REC lead in EAS reported reviewing what had worked well in 2015/16 and assessing consistency across LAs to inform funding decisions in 2016/17; the GwE REC lead reported researching the most effective type of training to offer at regional level from information about them online; and the REC lead in CSC reported building on the work identified in good practice case studies identified in ESTYN reports by bringing together LACE coordinators and schools to share good practice before planning the next funding round.

6.38   At LA level, one LACE coordinator used case studies of good practice to decide what to fund; others decided to implement interventions on the basis of good practice they accepted from the experience gained in other regions or LAs (for example nurture groups in GwE) or after conducting their own limited research into the effects of

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[80] Pye, J., Taylor, C. and Huxley, K. (2017). op. cit.

different types of training and interventions (for example relationship-based play training in ERW). Some LAs had activity evaluation reports, but it is not clear if and how these were used by any LACE coordinators to inform future funding decisions.

6.39   National stakeholder groups highlighted the need for RECs and LAs to develop a stronger evidence base for selecting interventions to support LAC to ensure they are being chosen because of what works:

> "I think we need to look at the evidence base as to what supports them best…. We don't have good quality evidence in these areas" (Stakeholder organisation representative).

School level funding decisions

6.40   CSC evaluated 2016/17 cluster bids against requirements for strong needs assessments and scoping based on research of what works (using primary and secondary evidence) to support the selection of activities and projects. However, it is not clear whether such comprehensive needs assessments and assessment of what works was commonplace across all funded interventions in schools.

6.41   Findings from the survey suggest there is limited evidence to suggest that spending bids and school allocations were made on the basis of a clear assessment of need and evidence of what works (Figure 6.4:). Over half of respondents who received grant funding made school-level funding decisions on the basis of individual needs of LAC in the school (69 per cent about funding in 2015/16 and 61 per cent about funding in 2016/17). Fewer respondents said they made decisions on the basis of a school-level needs assessment (55 per cent indicated this was the case in 2015/16, and half of respondents said the same in 2016/17). Only a fifth reported making evidence-based decisions (21 per cent in 2015/16 and 16 per cent in 2016/17).

6.42   Similar findings were reported in the final evaluation report of the PDG which concluded that schools where the attainment gap is largest were generally the least receptive to making evidence-based decisions and using evidence of "what works" in closing the attainment gap; they instead tend to rely on previous experience or instinct. Reasons for this included schools being unaware of the evidence, overwhelmed by the amount of evidence available, sceptical about evidence that did not fit with their personal experiences, or feeling that recommended toolkits were 'gimmicks' that tried to bypass the need for improved teaching and learning.

Figure 6.4: Evidence used to make school-level spending decisions
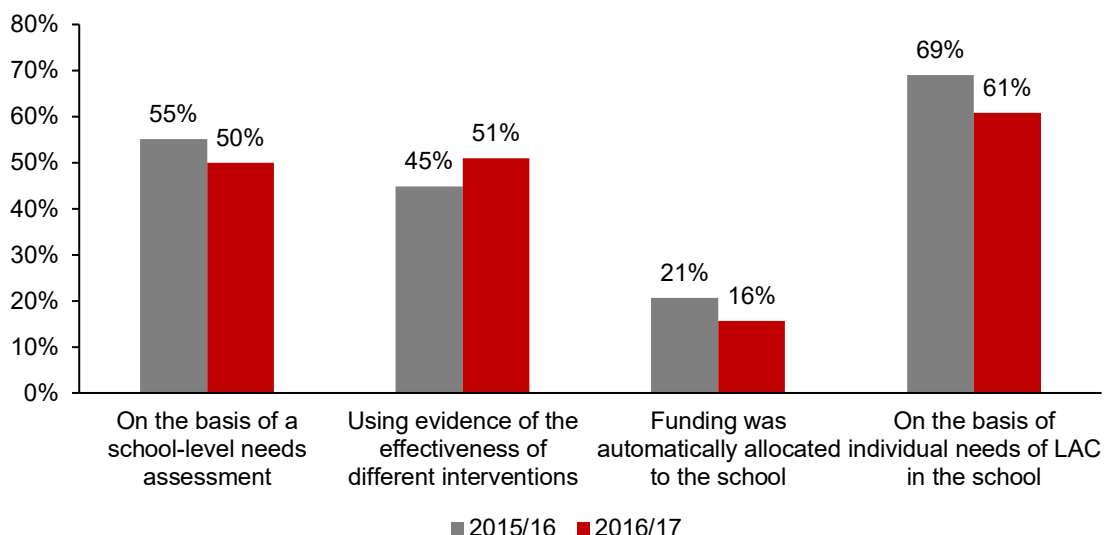
Base: All respondents who received grant funding in 2015/16 (N = 87) and in 2016/17 (N = 102).

Assessment of funded activities against best practice

6.43   Despite any clear evidence of activities being systematically funded on the basis of evidence of what works and best practice, this section considers the extent to which funded activities align with the effective interventions identified in the literature review in chapter 3, and findings from focus groups with care experienced young people.

6.44   The consultations with young people undertaken as part of this evaluation found that care-experienced young people identified some teachers, foster parents and friends as key individuals who help them with their education. This finding is broadly in line with the academic literature. They also felt that the provision of technology, for example a laptop, desktop computer or mobile phone would help them most with their education and help them feel more aligned with children who have birth parents. This contrasts with the literature review findings which found limited evidence of the impact of material resources unless young people received sufficient accompanying support to use them constructively.

6.45   When asked how the grant should be spent they specified that they would like to have a safe space in school or a chill-out room to allow them to rest if they hadn't slept and to support their wider emotional and wellbeing needs; a safe/private space for accessing support staff; staff training to ensure they are adequately equipped to deal with bullying and understand and address the needs of LAC; the recruitment of additional staff, for example support workers, TAs, nurses or counsellors; the provision of after-school and lunch clubs consisting of varied activities decided by the young people (they highlighted animal interaction experiences, trips abroad, sports

activities and trips and the opportunity to undertake charity work); and better access to resources, particularly IT.

6.46   0 below assesses the extent to which activities were funded in line with best practice identified in this report. The clearest evidence of alignment is for the recruitment of support staff, and the provision of tuition and attachment training. However, while the coverage of support staff is generally clear, there is not enough evidence to identify the reach and scope of tuition provision and attachment training (at REC and LA level) to assess the extent to which best practice activities have been delivered. There was much less evidence of monitoring and evaluation systems, widespread training for foster carers, providing safe spaces/rooms for young people, providing material resources and delivering school clubs designed and chosen by LAC.

Table 6.8: Evidence of alignment of activities with best practice

Best practice intervention	CSC	EAS	ERW	GwE
Establishing robust monitoring systems and tools and clear evaluation procedures that local authority and school staff are trained to use.	Evidence of one LA funding monitoring and evaluation improvements	Some evidence of moving to a more systematised monitoring approach (FADE system)	Limited evidence of in-kind work to improve monitoring and evaluation	No clear evidence although identified as a priority
Providing training to school staff on the social and emotional needs of looked after children and how to meet them	Clear evidence; scale unclear	Clear evidence; scale unclear	Clear evidence; scale unclear	Clear evidence; scale unclear
Providing training to foster carers to help them better support children's educational needs at home	Limited evidence	Limited evidence	Limited evidence	Limited evidence
Providing wider capacity-building support to designated teachers, social workers and foster carers	Some evidence (staff recruitment and best practice sharing)	Some evidence (staff recruitment and best practice sharing)	Clear evidence (through work of support staff)	Some evidence (networking and best practice sharing)
Developing safe spaces for young people to support their wellbeing needs	Limited evidence	Limited evidence	Limited evidence	Limited evidence
Providing individual tuition for looked after children in key skills such as reading and basic mathematics	Clear evidence; scale unclear	Clear evidence; scale unclear	Clear evidence; scale unclear	Clear evidence; scale unclear
Providing material resources with appropriate accompanying support to ensure that young people use them constructively	Limited evidence	Limited evidence	Limited evidence	Limited evidence
Providing additional support staff	Clear evidence	Clear evidence	Clear evidence	Some evidence at school/cluster level
Providing lunch and after-school clubs designed by young people	No evidence	No evidence	No evidence	No evidence

Source: findings in this table summarise findings from across all data sources used in the evaluation.

Planned allocations and alignment with actual spend

6.47   This section explores the extent to which planned allocations were based on costings related to expected inputs, outputs and outcomes and had budgets, outputs and outcomes specified, and whether grants were used in line with these expectations and good practice.

6.48   All RECs were required to provide the Welsh Government with support plans for both years. In general, the format of the support plan template led to largely qualitative responses with little to no consistency in style of response across RECs, although plan quality improved in 2016/17 in line with more detailed reporting criteria from the Welsh Government. ICF also received spending plans and regional plans from EAS and CSC which provided clearer breakdowns of spend per activity. Table 6.9: below provides a high-level summary of the information provided by RECs.

Table 6.9: Clarity of REC-level information against evaluation criteria

	CSC	EAS	ERW	GwE
Clear costings and budget	Clear breakdown of costings per activity and actual spend against plan for 15/16 (REC and LA level); high level breakdown of spend for 16/17	Relatively clear breakdown of costings by priority and activity across both years (REC and LA level 15/16; REC level only 16/17)	2015/16: No clear breakdown of activities; no costs associated; 2016/17: breakdown of high-level activities but no cost information.	No clear breakdown of activities and no costs associated in either year. Two embedded documents outlining activities in 16/17 but not provided to ICF.
Clear output and outcome measures/targets	Some indication of desired impact and evaluation plans but generally lacked detail; outlined attainment targets for 16/17.	Some indication of desired impact and monitoring plans per activity but generally lacked detail; outlined attainment and attendance targets (LA and REC level in 15/16; REC level in 16/17)	No outcome targets specified in either year.	No targets in 2015/16; 2016/17 plan mentioned plans to develop outcomes measures and targets linked to attendance and exclusion.

6.49   Plans for 2017/18 appear to have clearer activity breakdowns, however spending breakdowns are still largely absent (EAS, ERW, GwE). General outcome targets are also clearer although most focus on quantitative attainment measures/targets rather than broader outcomes. In addition to spending plans, RECs are required to produce

twice-yearly 'Highlight Reports' which provide information on actual progress against plans. In general, reports are mostly qualitative descriptions of progress and implementation problems and do not provide spend or monitoring updates. The quality of updates was also limited by the lack of detail provided in some of the original plans.

6.50   At LA level, the following spend information was provided (Table 6.10:). In general, there was no standardised approach to reporting planned spend across LAs. LAs in CSC and ERW provided the clearest breakdowns of planned spend per activity in relatively standardised spending plans but these were not provided/available for all LAs. GwE appears to have introduced a standard spreadsheet for reporting planned and actual spend against three main activity types in 2016/17, however not all LAs seem to have used this template. In some cases, spreadsheets provided total planned spend but no breakdown by activities.

6.51   Most actual spend data was also unclear (Table 6.10:). It was often reported as individual data entries with no standardised approach to summarising spending by activity type. Also, few LAs provided any comparison of planned versus actual spend. Those which did were with few exceptions unable to provide planned and actual figures broken down by activity or standardised activity categories.

Table 6.10: Spending information provided by LAs

REC	2015/16 spend information	2016/17 spend information
ERW	Planned spend (3 LAs); actual spend (1 LA); planned vs actual spend (2 LAs)	Planned spend (3 LAs); actual spend (1 LA); planned vs actual spend (2 LAs)
CSC	Planned vs actual spend (3 LAs)	Planned vs actual spend (2 LAs)
GwE	Actual spend (3 LAs but no breakdowns by activity, one LA only provided a breakdown for training)	Actual spend (3 LAs but no breakdowns by activity, one LA only provided a breakdown for training)
	Planned vs actual spend (1 LA)	Planned vs actual spend (2 LAs)
EAS	Actual spend (3 LAs)	Actual spend (2 LAs)

6.52   Given the limited information available from plans, at REC level it has only been possible to assess overall planned spend against actual spend in CSC in 2015/16. In 2015/16, actual spend was generally in line with plans although small under- and over-spends were identified for some activities.

6.53   At LA level, 12 documents provided comparative information on planned versus actual spend. Most LAs reported no over- or underspend (7 reports). Two LAs (GwE and ERW) reported relatively small overspends of £1,050 and £46.30 respectively. Three LAs reported large variations from planned spend: one LA in CSC reported an £86k underspend on planned activities in 2015/16 which was spent as part of a contingency plan including a 'virtual project', capacity building activities and Achievement for All training; one LA in GwE reported a £20,558 underspend on a £62,447 grant allocation in 2015/16 (with no explanation provided); and one LA in ERW reported a £24,621 overspend on a £232,554 allocation in 2016/17.

Key summary points

6.54   Funding delegations:

- The levels (REC, LA, school) to which RECs delegated grant funding for decisions about allocations varied across RECs and between years. All RECs retained some funding for LAs (in 2015/16), and two retained some funding for LAs in 2016/17 (not EAS or CSC). All RECs provided funding to schools (or clusters); some directly (GwE in both years, CSC and EAS in 2016/17), and some through LA funding (CSC and EAS 2015/16, GwE and ERW), although funding proportions varied by REC.

- Variations in approach to determining funding allocations were identified: instead of using SSIA data to determine allocation totals for LAs or school clusters, three RECs used PLASC data.

- All RECs used a formula (rather than bidding) approach to funding allocations to LAs; bidding was more commonly used for school allocations at REC or LA level.

- Between 2 and 12 per cent of total regional funding was held at REC level; RECs generally held a greater percentage of funding at regional level in 2016/17 compared to 2015/16. All RECs held some money to fund REC leadership and management and regional level training on attachment issues and behaviour change. A very small proportion of funding was also used for networking and best practice sharing activities in CSC, ERW and GwE and for supporting improved monitoring and evaluation.

- At LA level, little funding was used for improving monitoring and evaluation systems and processes; almost all LAs reported using funding to deliver LA level training; over half funded LA level support staff; just under half of LAs across all

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RECs reported using funding for best practice sharing activities; and almost all reported providing direct support to LAC. ERW was the only REC to consistently fund additional support staff at LA level in all LAs.

- Less information was available on the activities funded through cluster or school bids but there is evidence of funding for school/cluster training, staff recruitment, individual support for LAC/specific interventions for LAC and whole school strategies that disproportionally support LAC. Little funding appears to have been allocated to monitoring and evaluation projects and networking and best practice sharing.

6.55 Funding processes:

- Late disbursement of funding affected REC, LA and school staff's ability to plan, deliver and evaluate activities. School survey respondents also highlighted limited support with bid applications and increased administrative burden resulting from cluster bidding processes.

- The majority of allocations appear to be in line with grant requirements. At REC level, LA and school-level spend are largely in line with general REC-level guidance and priorities. It is more difficult to assess the alignment of school bursary funding and cluster bids with REC level priorities given the lack of clear spend and monitoring information available.

- There is some evidence that REC and LA staff drew on evidence of need to inform funding allocations and that for cluster bids RECs or LAs generally required schools to submit funding requests that provided some information on identified needs. Tuition, attachment training and support staff were funded by the grant which aligns with best practice. However, there was limited evidence of funding for other best practice activities.

- There is some evidence that funding decisions at REC and LA level were based on evidence of what works and were funded in line with best practice but no systematic approach to identifying what works and feeding it into decision-making processes was identified.

- At school level, over half of respondents who received grant funding said they made school-level funding decisions on the basis of individual needs of LAC in the school but fewer respondents said they made decisions on the basis of a

school-level needs assessment (just over half) and only a fifth reported making evidence-based decisions.

- Allocations often lacked costings and budgets. While total allocations by RECs and LA have been reported, not all provide clear breakdowns of planned spend by activity type.

- In general, there is largely qualitative reporting in REC support plans with no standardised approach to reporting planned spend across LAs and limited/unclear reporting of actual spend at REC and LA level which made comparisons of planned and actual allocations difficult.

- Where planned and actual spend could be compared some LAs had large under or over-spends in one or both funding years.

- The content and quality of REC level plans were mixed. While some reported expected outputs, outcomes and targets, sometimes broken down by activity, in general the quality and clarity of target setting and the specificity/measurability of selected outcomes was poor.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

7.1 This section assesses whether:

- Systems are in place to account for spending and monitor uses and beneficiaries of the grant;

- Measures are in place to regularly assess value for money, outcomes and sustainability; and

- LAC and practitioners see that the grant makes a difference.

Monitoring of grant spending and use

7.2 All RECs have systems in place to account for spending allocations to some extent, however, systems are of varying form and quality. This is described more fully in the section on monitoring planned expenditure in the previous chapter. RECs and LAs do not have standard reporting formats and metrics of proportions of allocations spent and the number and proportion of planned outputs achieved, such as staff trained, LAC benefitting, staff/hours of additional staff employed. No REC or LA was able to provide a clear summary of all REC, LA and school-level planned and actual spend with clear details of the purpose of, and beneficiaries of, each grant allocation.

Monitoring and evaluation of value for money, outcomes and sustainability
Systems and practice

7.3 Welsh Government guidance requires that at the end of each year RECs must demonstrate that the attainment gap between LAC and all pupils has reduced through the use of the PDG LAC. They are expected to produce evaluative reports for the Welsh Government analysing how expenditure has impacted on educational outcomes. Guidance also highlights that it is the role of REC leads to be responsible for the collection and analysis of outcomes data and prepare interim and final progress reports, while LACE coordinators are required to monitor, collate and analyse performance information on an individual and collective basis.

7.4 There is little evidence that this is carried out as RECs are not providing these reports although as Table 7.1: shows, several RECs have systems in place to monitor educational outcomes for LAC. RECs and LAs have various ways of monitoring and evaluating their expenditure of the grants but these do not in the main assess value for money, the sustainability of the outcomes nor their contribution towards LAC's educational outcomes (attendance, attainment, progression). Table 7.1: shows that

methods for monitoring and data collected vary greatly by REC and LA. Several have described systems for collecting information (such as impact reports in CSC and EAS), monitoring activities (quarterly reports, visits to schools) and collecting and collating monitoring data on LAC progress.

Table 7.1: Summary of monitoring and evaluation systems per REC

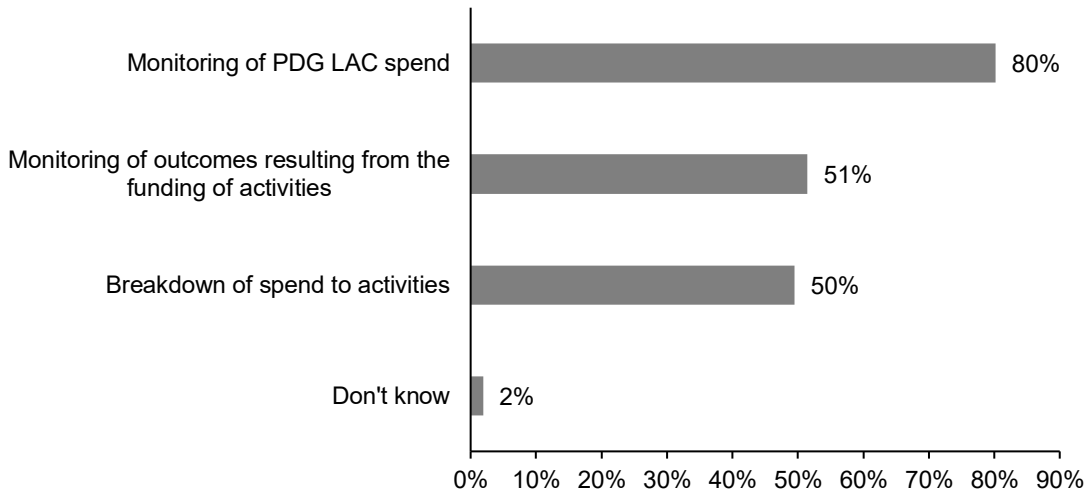|	CSC	EAS	GwE	ERW
Stakeholders responsible for monitoring	REC lead 2015/16: LACE coordinators and schools 2016/17: Challenge advisors and schools	REC lead via REC Steering Group 2015/16: LACE coordinators and schools 2016/17: Cluster leads, LACE coordinators and schools	Performance Manager (REC level), LACE coordinators and schools/lead schools in clusters	Training coordinator/REC lead, LACE teams and schools
Monitoring and evaluation process 2015/16	Financial audit for schools: all schools required to submit spending plans and impact reports. Virtual headteacher spreadsheet populated by consortia data (in place prior to PDG LAC) – traffic light system for tracking individual student outcomes. Schools required to set individual targets and review tracking data termly. Targets reviewed by LAS. Tracking of pupil progress for specific interventions evidenced through pupil and school profiles.	Regional pupil tracker spreadsheet including quantitative and qualitative outcomes; targets set and data collected by schools and collated locally by LACE coordinators. Monthly financial monitoring against five regional targets (5 R's) Impact evaluations provided by schools quality assured by LACE teams on a termly basis.	Each LA required to report back to REC on spending plans, but large variation in methods. A format for these sessions was developed by one LA and shared regionally and nationally with other LACE co-ordinators. Performance Manager coordinates quarterly monitoring reports via Excel system. REC also evaluates all courses and workshops with teachers at regional level (reports not available to ICF).	LAs required to conduct quarterly audit of spend but no information available on why money was spent as it was. PEP used to track individual pupils and monitor attainment, however LACE coordinators are only able to track pupils who they are corporate parent for. Each LA has own system for recording exclusions, school moves and placement changes; no information held centrally and ERW not aware of how schools are recording or monitoring progress. No regional monitoring system as no REC lead in place.
Monitoring and evaluation process 2016/17	In practice there was limited monitoring undertaken by challenge advisors due to late provision of funding; and no clear monitoring	Move to cluster monitoring; development of new spreadsheet to monitor and track school spending; regional approach reflected in targets and performance levels; and data shared across region. Schools required to submit progress reports and keep records of financial spend.	Same as 2015/16.	Regional 'LAC markbook' developed in 2015/16 to provide a monitoring tool for attendance; attainment; engagement and exclusions for all LAC in ERW schools. Evaluation/ Success indicators monitored through Case Studies, Questionnaires, Distance Travelled Scores, Attendance and Attainment

	CSC	EAS	GwE	ERW
	requirements were provided to schools.	LACE coordinators expected to collate individual pupil tracking data.		data, post 16 destination and NEET data.
				Tracking form to monitor levels of training/support offered to schools and level of staffing support; collated termly by the Training Coordinator.
LA level monitoring	Range of methods used in 2015/16 including: school-based reports/audits of interventions; and informal discussions with each school to ensure spend in line with plans and to discuss outcomes.	Range of methods used in 15/16 including: developing a spreadsheet on actual and potential impacts of the grant on each child; visits to schools; school cases studies; general tracking exclusion and attainment; and providing progress reports and individual child-based evaluations.	Range of methods used over both years including: no monitoring of spend; tracking financial spend but not outcomes data or ad-hoc impact evaluations for some interventions; collecting informal written feedback from schools and conducting LACE school visits; and conducting LA-level group evaluations of bursaries and training.	Range of methods used over both years including: regular reporting to REC against LA spending plans; tracking of spend through virtual school but no systematic outcomes evaluation; monitoring of individual student progress; evaluations of training interventions; evaluations using outcomes star; using anecdotal outcomes data; half-termly evaluations by LAC learning coach; and tracking of number of completed PEPs.

Source: LACE coordinator and REC lead interviews, documentary evidence and information from case studies.

7.5   It is also clear that there appears to be confusion regarding whose role it is to monitor spend and outcomes at each level given the range of funding allocations, governance and resourcing at different levels. Two successful monitoring approaches were identified from the interviews and case studies, however further improvements to these systems were suggested:

- In ERW, where the majority of funding was usually held at LA level and coordinated by funded support staff, one LA reported using a spreadsheet to track spending by LA level support staff and link spend to outcomes achieved. Support staff were responsible for tracking the progress of interventions they undertook with individual pupils, delivering questionnaires to evaluate training interventions and group activities for LAC and feeding this information into the spreadsheet. Schools were also required to feed in monitoring information alongside LA-level standardised monitoring data (on attainment, attendance etc.) which was then turned into a termly report by the LACE coordinator.

- In EAS the development of a regional tracking and monitoring system highlighted the potential benefits of using a regional, standardised approach to monitoring. EAS developed a regional spreadsheet which included details of the amount of funding, the intervention, and type of support. It also had a section in the report setting out impacts on: attendance, behaviour, academic attainment and 'other' outcomes. LACE coordinators and schools were expected to feed data into this spreadsheet. However, outcome information provided in the spreadsheet was largely qualitative or reflected outcome targets rather than outcomes achieved. Some LACE coordinators said they were not clear about their monitoring role and how to feed into the spreadsheet.

- At school level, monitoring and reporting generally did not go beyond accounting for the expenditure (Figure 7.1:). Most school staff said they monitored total spend (80%), though only 50% provided a breakdown of spend per activity and 51% monitored outcomes resulting from spend.
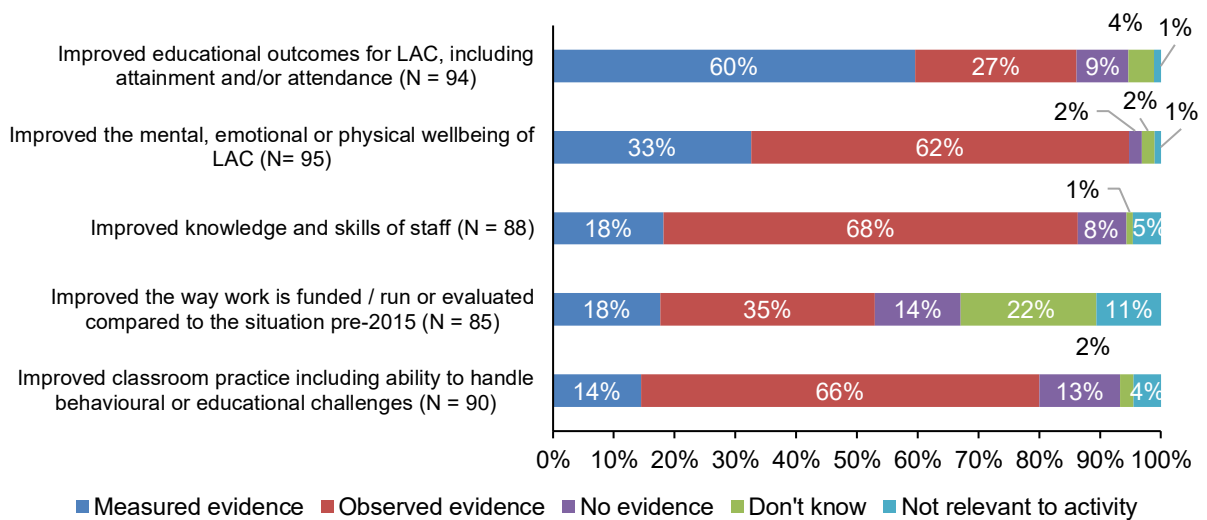
Figure 7.1: How does your school account for spend?

Monitoring of PDG LAC spend	80%
Monitoring of outcomes resulting from the funding of activities	51%
Breakdown of spend to activities	50%
Don't know	2%

Base: All respondents who received grant funding (N = 131, 30 non-responses excluded). Tick all that apply.

7.6   When measured outcomes data was recorded, most focussed on reporting increases in attainment or attendance rather than wellbeing outcomes or impacts on staff or school processes (Figure 7.2:).

Figure 7.2: Outcomes of school activities funded by the PDG-LAC

Legend: ■ Measured evidence ■ Observed evidence ■ No evidence ■ Don't know ■ Not relevant to activity

Base: All respondents who reported using PDG LAC funding in 2015/16 and/or 2016/17 (N = 108). Non-response varied (13 – 23) for each statement and is excluded from totals.

Stakeholder feedback on monitoring systems

7.7   Overall, interviewees felt that systems were now more strategic and schools were more accountable for their spending compared to pre-2015 when money was allocated directly to schools. However, all were aware (national, REC and LA) that monitoring and evaluation systems were still generally poor and required

improvements. REC and LA staff reported that they had difficulties in defining and establishing agreed ways of monitoring spend and outcomes data across LAs and RECs and this led to considerable inconsistencies, or a complete lack of monitoring in some cases:

> "Schools don't really have to provide evidence and there is no formal way of following things up. It's a grey area and can be abused. There are still examples of misdirected funds despite an improvement in directly targeting LAC" (LACE coordinator, GwE).

7.8   All called for a clearer, more systematic approach to monitoring across RECs and LAs. Several interviewees also suggested improved clarity over the types of outcome they should be reporting against:

> "There is a whole lot that can be improved nationally around monitoring and tracking of looked after children…it shouldn't be that difficult to have a system, that is a virtual model like in England, for each consortium" (LACE coordinator, ERW)

> "In an ideal world there would be one approach across all LAs for everything to do with LAC and a common wellbeing measure" (LACE coordinator, GwE)

7.9   Improved monitoring and evaluation was highlighted as a key priority for the 2017/18 funding year. For example, ERW reported plans to develop standardised templates and tracking forms for monitoring spend and outcomes at LA level and develop methods for evaluating a broader set of outcomes, not just attainment and attendance. Interviewees identified the following challenges with current monitoring and evaluation requirements:

- Smaller schools, particularly primary schools have limited capacity to develop strong monitoring systems;

- Making decisions on spending and implementing these late in the financial year made it difficult to require monitoring and evaluation to be carried out. For example, one LA in CSC reported that LACEs met to devise new monitoring and evaluation forms to send out to schools but agreed it was unfair to ask schools to report on the outcomes:

> "The system in place wasn't great. Funding wasn't allocated early enough which had an impact on the quality of evaluation" (LACE coordinator, EAS);

- Required outcome measures at national and REC level were regarded as unclear. A few LACE coordinators said they were confused about the extent to

which they should be reporting against corporate parent indicators, such as the number of completed PEPs or mental health and wellbeing scores, or against school improvement indicators, such as on school attendance and attainment. LACE coordinators also felt that despite Welsh Government requirements, reporting against attainment and attendance indicators was inappropriate given the small numbers of LAC in each year group and the fluid nature of LAC cohorts. They called for a broader approach to outcome measures focussing on the wider needs of each child:

> "It becomes really difficult because people want you to look at groups of children…and look at the cohort of LAC and look at their attainment. But surely it's their wellbeing that's the most important thing. I mean wellbeing is certainly the important thing for me. If I'm under such pressure or such trauma then what's the first thing that has to give, well it's my work, sorry, and yet we expect children to go to school and achieve" (LACE coordinator, ERW);

- There was a lack of clarity around who was responsible for monitoring when funding systems changed. In EAS, the REC coordinator felt that moving to a cluster approach may have improved monitoring as it became more strategic but most LAs felt monitoring had got worse as they no longer had any awareness of how money was being spent and were unclear whether it was their responsibility to monitor spend and outcomes:

> "[It] doesn't feel like our grant to monitor" (LACE coordinator, EAS).

- No spending or outcomes data were available for grants allocated to clusters in GwE or CSC; and

- One LA in GwE felt that strict evaluation requirements will deter schools from bidding for funding:

> "I can see schools saying 'well, if I have to write a self-assessment on the grant, I won't go to the effort of trying for it and in the end, what will happen is that the LAC will lose out" (LACE coordinator, GwE).

The impact of the grant: does it make a difference?

7.10   Given the overall quality of monitoring and evaluation systems in place, there is very limited evidence of measured impact of the grant. Most information reported in this section is qualitative being drawn from case studies and interviews which have not been supported by quantitative information.

7.11 In general[81], interviewees felt that the new funding arrangements have greatly increased the profile of LAC and wider disadvantaged learners in Wales. Despite limited concrete evidence of outcomes from spend, all stakeholders feel that the grant has had some impact over and above existing funding provision and money is being more accurately targeted to LAC and other eligible learners:

> "It is a change from an individual to a strategic approach, using money for the proper purpose of supporting the achievement of LAC. Before, sometimes it wasn't focussed enough on by schools and was spent elsewhere" (REC level stakeholder, EAS)

7.12 More widely, the grant was identified as facilitating the sustainable upskilling of staff and strengthening capacity across schools, improving links between stakeholders including schools, LAs, social services and foster carers, and developing more systematic and strategic ways of working.

> *"This new funding approach has ensured consistency across the region and has increased the capacity of schools to meet the needs of LAC"* (LACE coordinator, ERW)

Impact of regional and LA-level activities

7.13 Over half (56 per cent) of school survey respondents stated someone in their school had attended training or professional development opportunities provided by RECs or LAs, and a further 41 per cent of respondents also received training or professional development themselves (Figure 7.3:). A slightly smaller proportion of respondents said either they (43 per cent) or someone in their school (46 per cent) had attended a networking or shared learning event, and 33 per cent said that their school/other school staff had also received support from staff recruited at LA level. Fewer said that someone in their school had used monitoring and evaluation systems provided by RECs or LAs (27 per cent).

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[81] This is broadly in line with the PDG evaluation. Pye, J., Taylor, C. and Huxley, K. (2017*) Evaluation of the Pupil Deprivation Grant: final report, Social Research Number 77/2017*, Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Figure 7.3: Proportion of respondents attending different REC or LA activities
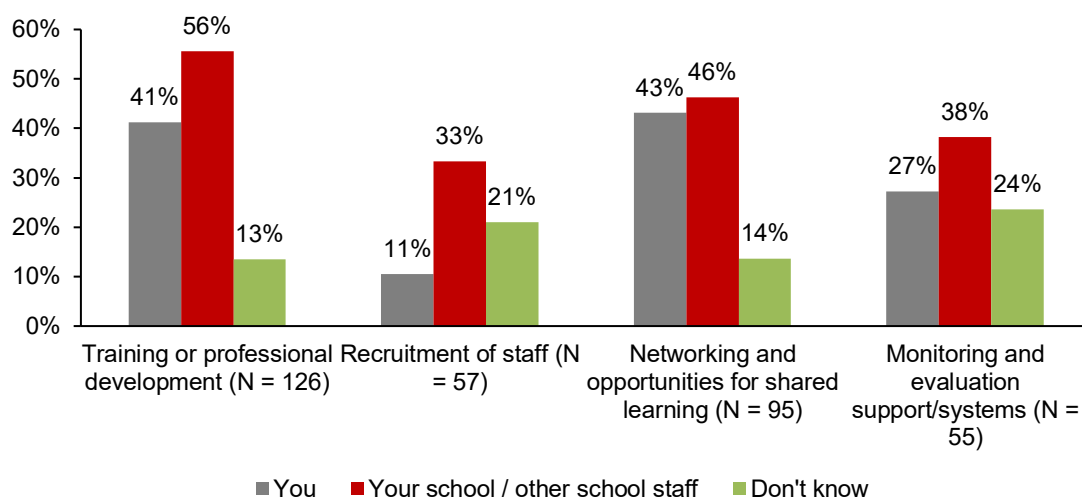
Base: All respondents aware of specific regional or local authority activities. This is noted in the figure.

Training

7.14   All REC-level interviewees and most LA-level interviewees felt that the delivery of regional and LA-level training had improved stakeholders' awareness of the needs of LAC and, in many cases, improved their ability to support LAC in the classroom. While one LACE coordinator would have liked more involvement in deciding the types of course to deliver at regional level, all valued a regional approach to training and its commissioning:

> "The training has certainly been beneficial to us in [this LA] because we wouldn't have been able to afford to do it without getting it through the region" (LACE coordinator, ERW)

7.15   Case study findings alongside an external evaluation report for regional training in ERW provide further detail of training outcomes. ERW used external trainers to deliver attachment awareness training to schools across the region. Training was initially targeted at a group of 'lead schools' in 2015/16 and then rolled out across the entire region. Interviewees believe that attendees have gained "confidence and practical skills" and have improved resilience and empathy levels which has had knock-on effects on reducing the escalation of bad behaviour among LAC. An external evaluation report[82] estimates that at least 1,186 participants from 127 schools participated in training[83].

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[82] Kate Cairns Associates (2017) *ERW Attachment Aware School project 2015-2017*: Longitudinal survey results. ERW

[83] Of these individuals, 603 completed at least one post-training questionnaire offering before/after assessments of understanding, frequency of application and confidence in explaining theory, 253 completed

7.16   Overall, 99 per cent of individuals responding to the externally commissioned survey (Kate Cairns Associates 2017) found the training useful and said they would recommend it to colleagues; 90 per cent said the training changed the way that they view and respond to behaviours (84 per cent felt that the change in behavioural approach occurred across their whole school); 78 per cent reported using their knowledge at least daily in their work (this finding was reported again several months after training); 68 per cent reported a better understanding of attachment issues immediately after training and 66 per cent reported a sustained level of understanding several months after training completion; 61 per cent said what they had learnt had a positive impact on their working relationships with parents, foster carers, social workers etc; 60 per cent reported introducing new structures or ways of working in response to training; and 57 per cent said they have been able to cascade learning across their school.

7.17   One LA in ERW also internally evaluated the impact of regional attachment awareness training on LAC. They reported that implementing Attachment Aware strategies in schools led to their best GCSE results for LAC in 2016 (since 2011); reduced the need of physical intervention/positive handling; and supported improved behaviour management, improving attendance and reducing exclusions. However, it is unclear how directly the outcomes can be attributed to the implementation of attachment training strategies alone.

7.18   In CSC, case study findings on the impact of Thrive training in one LA also highlighted its positive impact on LAC and school staff. Once they become a trained Thrive practitioner, staff undertake a Thrive assessment with pupils and arrange flexible support as required including therapy sessions, additional tuition, emotional literacy support and/or ensuring staff are aware of any support needs. Outcomes reported by interviewees included: improved monitoring of outcomes as the Thrive approach includes an embedded system for target setting and monitoring outcomes for LAC; improvements in children's ability to develop healthy relationships; reductions in the number of exclusions and improvements in attainment; facilitation of a more stable home life by conducting assessments and providing advice to foster carers; and improvements to the emotional development of LAC.

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the longitudinal survey (six months after the first training event) and 212 completed both a post-training questionnaire and a longitudinal survey.

7.19 In line with these findings, most school-level survey respondents were positive about the outcomes of training activities, with over 80 per cent of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing to the statements below. Only 13 per cent of respondents disagreed that they have noticed improvements in LAC progress in attainment, and 12 per cent disagreed that it has improved teaching practices.

Figure 7.4: School outcomes of the REC or LA training activities
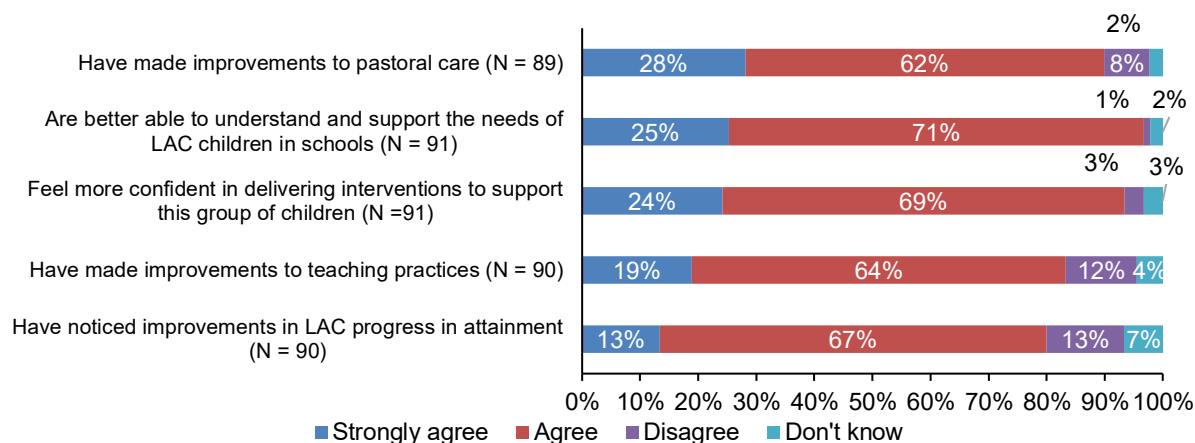
Base: All respondents who attended REC/LA training activities (N = 92). Non-response excluded (varies from 1-3)

Staff recruitment

7.20 In general, the case studies and survey respondents provide very positive evidence of the impact of staff recruited to undertake support for specific activities. At school level, 22 survey respondents said they had received support from LA-level staff and all respondents commenting on the outcomes of this support (20 respondents) strongly agreed or agreed that it had supported capacity-building within schools, 20 out of 21 respondents felt it had improved school support for LAC (one respondent did not know) and 20 respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that the support improved the educational and/or wellbeing outcomes for LAC (although one respondent strongly disagreed).

7.21 An internal evaluation of the support provided by one LA wellbeing team (LAC) in ERW provided measured evidence of positive impact. A total of 79 secondary school students and 62 primary school students across 73 schools received support from the team between September 2015 and July 2017. Pupils receiving support from engagement workers (one to one support; access to education engagement activities, resources, tuition and transition support) were asked to rate between 1-5 (1 being negative, 5 being positive) how they felt at the start and end of an intervention

against the following questions: do you feel listened to at school; do you feel safe at school; can you talk to the adults at school; are you able to concentrate at school; do you feel happy at school; and do you get on with friends at school? All respondents (18 individuals) reported overall improvements.

7.22   Feedback on school support (TA interventions and advice and strategies from the Advisor for Attachment and Trauma) provided in the ERW internal evaluation was also overwhelmingly positive, with all schools reporting overall improvements in their understanding of LAC's emotional and behavioural needs, their confidence in responding to LAC's emotional and behavioural challenges, their understanding of the impact of trauma and neglect on learning; and their understanding of the impact of attachment aware principles on learning.

7.23   Case studies[84] and interviewees report the following outcomes from the availability of LA-level support staff funded from the grant:

- **Outcomes for LAC:** a reduction in the number of exclusions and PRU referrals; improved wellbeing and mental health; improved educational attainment; an increase in the number of completed PEPs; a reduction in the number of school moves and increased support for moves;

- **Outcomes for schools and school staff:** support staff have generally been really well received by schools despite some initial reservations and school staff have reported feeling more confident, informed and supported to work with LAC and address their needs. School support has also been identified as promoting whole-school culture change and helping to embed learning from training into everyday practice through tailored support; and introducing new ways of working to staff;

    "Schools really appreciate a proactive team that when things are really, really difficult they can sort of pick up the phone and things are on their way" (LACE coordinator, ERW); and

- **Wider systems outcomes:** well-resourced LACE teams are able to provide broad support across the LA, but tailored to individual pupil needs. The recruitment of staff has also been linked with a greater focus on the wellbeing needs of LAC, rather than a narrow focus on attainment; providing a better link

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[84] One case study looking at the impact of an LA-level LAC Mentor and one case study looking at the impact of an LA level education support officer.

between school and home environments and facilitating a multi-agency approach; improving the quality of monitoring and evaluation at local level; and raising awareness of the wider support needs of all pupils.

> "The change in funding allocations have been huge. There have been tangible benefits for looked after children because it's reaching more staff and pupils in our schools than I thought it could, but it's not just LAC it's all pupils" (LACE coordinator, ERW)
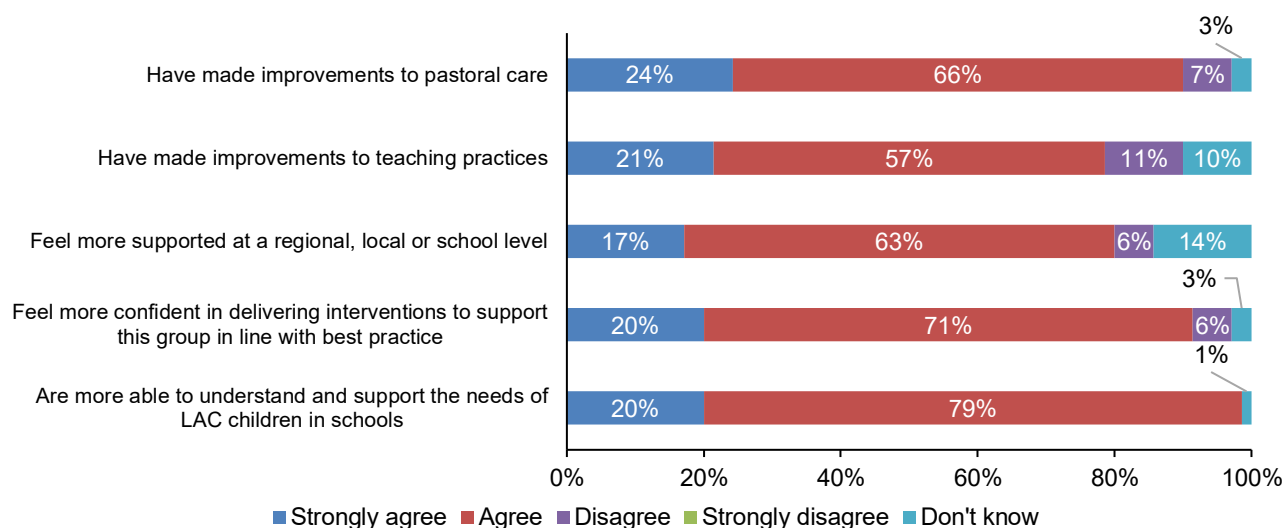
Networking and shared learning activities

7.24 Limited funding was used to develop networking and shared learning opportunities. However, interviewees have reported improved collaboration and coordination between a wide range of stakeholders at regional, LA and school level, resulting from funded and in-kind networking activities:

> *"Even in the first two years, I think the planning is there to encourage authorities to come together to share good practice."* (LACE coordinator, GwE)

7.25 LA and school staff interviewed as part of a case study focussing on the development of a best practice booklet and associated toolkit for supporting LAC in schools reported that they felt the booklet had successfully increased their understanding of the needs of LAC and how best to support them, including providing practical advice to other school staff. The booklet was developed in collaboration with two LAs and academics from Cardiff University and involved consultations with LAC.

7.26 Of the 70 school staff who reported participating in networking or shared learning opportunities at regional or local level, the large majority (78-99 per cent) agreed or strongly agreed that they led to improvements in pastoral care and teaching practices, improved support for staff at regional, local or school level, increased staff confidence in delivering effective interventions for LAC and improved understanding and ability to support the needs of LAC children in schools (Figure 7.5:). Nonetheless, 11 per cent of respondents disagreed that the networking/shared learning opportunities have made improvements to teaching practices (and 10 per cent did not know) and 7 per cent disagreed it has made improvements to pastoral care (and 3 per cent did not know).

Figure 7.5: School outcomes of the REC or LA networking/shared learning opportunities

Base: All respondents who attended REC/LA networking/shared learning activities (N = 70). No non-response.

Monitoring and evaluation

7.27 Little funding was used for monitoring and evaluation activities but a few improvements to monitoring systems were made as part of wider grant activities (for example through the work of staff recruited at LA level). Very limited evidence of the impact of evaluation work was identified however, at school level, from the 29 respondents who were engaged in PDG LAC funded monitoring/evaluation projects (or knew that someone in their school was). About three-quarters (21 respondents) strongly agreed or agreed that they have improved the monitoring and evaluation of school-level funding, activities or outcomes. Two respondents disagreed, and five did not know. No respondents expressed strong disagreement.

Impact of school-level activities

7.28 School-level survey respondents were asked to comment on the impact of the intervention/s delivered in their school (Figure 7.6:). Respondents who delivered more than one intervention were asked to comment on the one they felt had the biggest impact[85]. Most survey respondents reported measured or observed evidence of improved educational outcomes for LAC (87 per cent), improved mental, emotional or physical wellbeing (95 per cent), improved knowledge and skills of staff (86 per cent) and improved classroom practice (80 per cent). Findings were less positive for

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[85] Most (71%) of respondents reported delivering specific interventions for LAC, followed by school training, recruitment of support staff, implementing whole school strategies for LAC, delivering bursary funding, supporting or developing partnership working and/or monitoring activities.

improvements in the way work is funded, run or evaluated with only 53 per cent of respondents reporting measured or observed evidence. Interviewees in case studies could not substantiate this.

Figure 7.6: Outcomes of school activities funded by the PDG-LAC
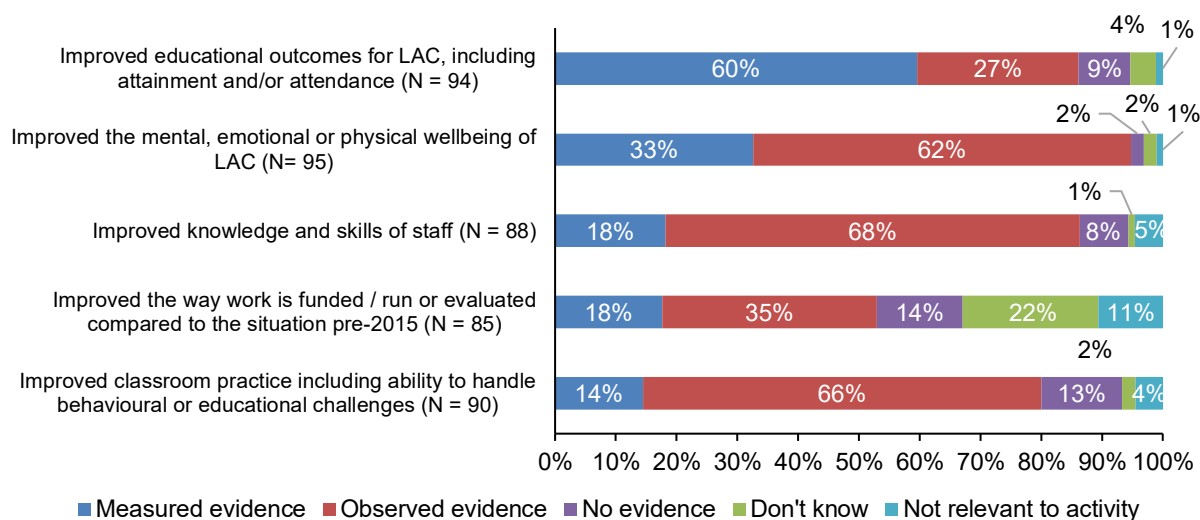
Base: All respondents who responded used PDG LAC funding in 2015/16 and/or 2016/17 (N = 108). Non-response varied (13 – 23) for each statement.

Sustainability

7.29   All interviewees understood that the purpose of the grant was to implement sustainable interventions, and all were focussed on facilitating sustainability through activities. However, despite this objective, very limited measured evidence of sustainability was identified by interviewees. The evaluation of training undertaken by ERW found evidence of sustained learning six months after training delivery and the use of this in their daily practice. All interviewees felt that training facilitated the long-term upskilling and capacity building of staff which reduced pressure on LACE Coordinators and their teams over the longer-term. However, given staff changes, it was important that courses continued to be offered and for trained staff to have refreshers to maintain momentum and continue to drive wider school culture change.

7.30   The recruitment of school staff was also identified by interviewees as a sustainable approach because they felt that over time, additional support staff helped to upskill and build capacity in schools which reduced the need for bursary provision as school staff could provide the necessary support themselves, with guidance from LA-level post-holders. For example, all school staff interviewed as part of the Education Officer case study in an LA in ERW reported feeling better informed about effective ways to work with LAC from having guidance on best practice and suggested new
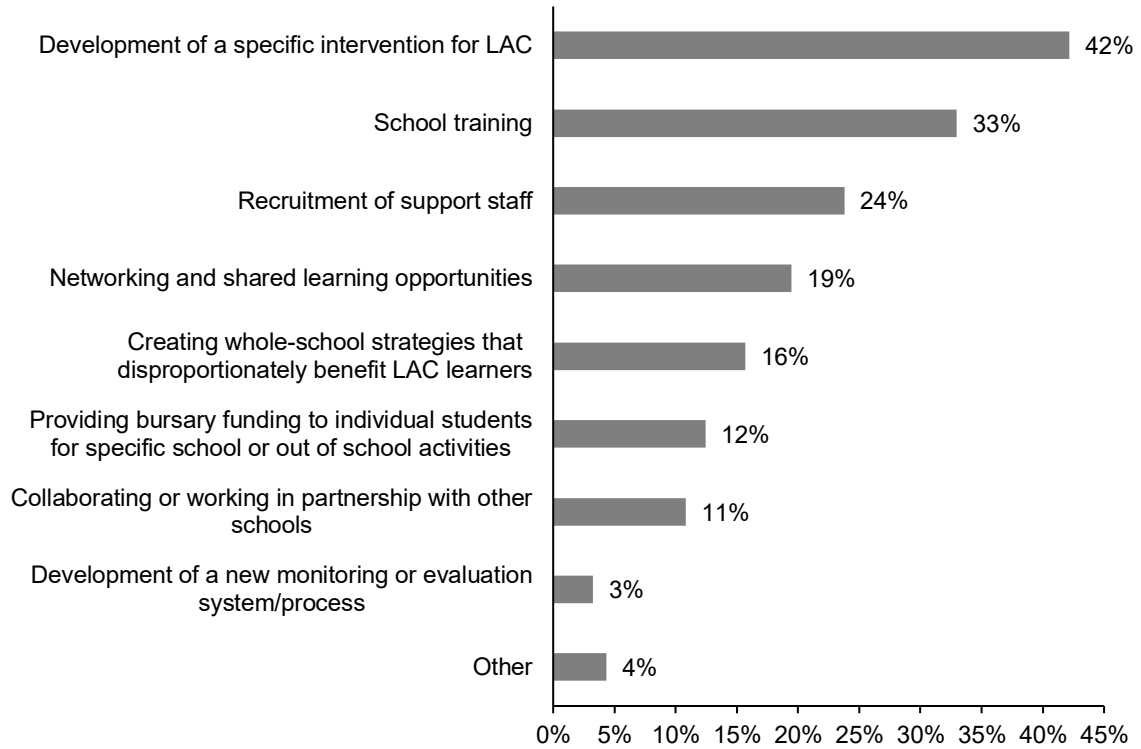
strategies to use with students. The funded staff member also worked closely with school staff to help embed learning from training through supporting them to implement newly learned techniques to cope with behaviour and attendance problems of LAC.

7.31 Finally, relationship-based play work was identified as extremely low-cost and sustainable. In one LA in ERW, training was delivered by LA-level staff and once trained, delivery of relationship-based play sessions required only a small investment in props/equipment and dedicated staff time.

Most effective activity types

7.32 At regional level, all REC and LA-level interviewees and most school staff felt that attachment training was particularly effective. At LA level, recruitment of LA-level additional staff, training and flexible bursary support were identified as having positive impacts on LAC.

7.33 For school survey respondents, the development of specific interventions for LAC; school training; and recruitment of school support staff were the top three activities that survey respondents felt were most successful (Figure 7.7:). However, of respondents who reported funding a specific intervention for LAC, only 59 per cent believed this was the most successful type of activity. Similarly, only 44 per cent of those providing school training believed it was the most successful type of activity.

Figure 7.7: Most successful type of activity (tick up to three activities)

| Activity	Percentage
Development of a specific intervention for LAC	42%
School training	33%
Recruitment of support staff	24%
Networking and shared learning opportunities	19%
Creating whole-school strategies that disproportionately benefit LAC learners	16%
Providing bursary funding to individual students for specific school or out of school activities	12%
Collaborating or working in partnership with other schools	11%
Development of a new monitoring or evaluation system/process	3%
Other	4%

Base: Respondents who aware of regional activities or LA-funded activities i.e. those who did not select 'none of the above' (N = 185). Tick up to three.

Most effective level of spend

7.34   Given the large variety of funding structures and processes, identifying the most effective level of spend is particularly difficult (Figure 7.8:). At school level, survey respondents felt that school level funding was most impactful (68 per cent), followed by LA level (22 per cent).

Figure 7.8: Level at which funding is most effective

Level	Percentage
Regional level	10%
Local authority level	22%
School level	68%
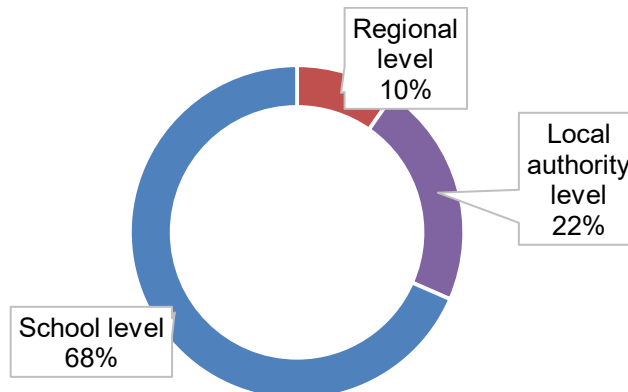
Base: All respondents who were aware of the PDG-LAC (N = 219). 206 responses, 15 non-responses which are excluded from the analysis.

7.35 Among REC and LA level interviewees, views were mixed. Where funding was delivered by RECs to school clusters, one REC lead and four LACE coordinators reported improved strategic coherence:

> "Schools are now sharing data and good practice and put on sessions for other schools – that's what [the REC] wants, peer learning and a cluster approach, you now have a network of activities going on for LAC" (REC lead).

7.36 However, most LACE coordinators preferred funding to be delivered at LA level as they were better placed to understand and address need which could be met across schools. A key criticism of REC level funding was that it was inflexible to the changing nature of needs. Once schools have bid for funding, in some cases there was no top-up funding available to address the individual emerging needs of LAC. Similarly, two LACE coordinators felt that cluster bidding did not provide adequate coverage of support for schools (i.e. not all schools were aware of the funding or did not bid for various reasons) and the requirement of primary schools and secondary schools to bid together reduced effectiveness of funding as the needs of each school type are often very different.

> "We definitely felt like we had better results [in 2015/16] and I think some of that is directly because we were able to be both proactive and reactive. Personally I feel like that's been taken away now because it's being held by the consortium…It's very difficult to get down to child level when you're covering such a large number of children and a large number of areas" (LACE coordinator, CSC)

7.37 In ERW, reflections on funding being held largely at LA level were positive. Case study findings from school staff, foster carers and social care staff all unanimously supported this model of support. Despite a lot of initial criticism and resentment from schools, all reported the added value of having a strong LACEs team and support staff to deliver effective, strategic interventions and monitor outcomes, something that they felt could not be achieved if money went straight to schools or clusters:

> "It was never going to be a popular decision to take funding from schools but we've won them around with relational and emotional support to managing behaviour. Initially schools were bitter but we have some converts who are really championing it in schools, the support on offer and the benefits of it have been tangible so schools have really come around" (LACE coordinator, ERW).

Key summary points

7.38 This section finds that:

- All RECs have systems in place to track spending allocations to some extent. However, systems are of varying form and quality which means there are no standardised reporting formats and metrics. Similar variations in monitoring and evaluation methods were identified at LA level, with some LAs reporting little to no monitoring of spend or outcomes. At school level, schools were not consistently monitoring outcomes resulting from spend.

- Not all LA and school staff responsible for spending grant allocations were clear about their role in monitoring the expenditure and the outcomes achieved. This is partly because of the differing funding allocation/disbursement processes, governance structures and levels of resourcing across LAs and RECs and partly because of the lack of clear guidance on the accountability for delegated funds.

- REC and LA level interviewees felt that schools were more accountable for their spending compared to pre-2015 when money was allocated directly to schools. However, they and national stakeholders were all aware that monitoring and evaluation systems were still generally poor and required improvements.

- Given the relatively poor quality of monitoring and evaluation systems in place, there is very limited evidence of measured impact of the grant. There was generally a consensus that:

  o The new funding arrangements have increased the profile of LAC's educational support and meant that funding is better targeting LAC;

  o The strategic funding has facilitated the sustainable upskilling of staff, strengthened capacity across schools, and improved links between stakeholders including schools, LAs, social services and foster carers;

  o REC and LA level training has improved stakeholders' awareness of the needs of LAC and, in many cases, improved their ability to support LAC in the classroom. Internal evaluation findings in ERW also linked attachment training to improvements in GCSE results and improved attendance and exclusion rates.

- Additional support staff had supported capacity-building within schools and improved educational and wellbeing outcomes for individual LAC, such as reduced exclusions, increased attainment and improved wellbeing.

- At regional level, training was identified as a particularly effective use of funding; at LA level staff recruitment, training and flexible bursary support were viewed as most effective; and at school level, survey respondents identified specific interventions for LAC, schools training and recruitment of school support staff as having the greatest impact.

8.   Conclusions

8.1   In this chapter the findings of the evaluation are drawn together to assess how well the system for allocating PDG LAC is operating and to what extent the grant is achieving its intended benefits.

How well is the system introduced in 2015 functioning?

8.2   The aims of the new funding system introduced in 2015 were to improve the strategic approach to funding decisions; reduce bureaucracy and administration; and expand the range of grant beneficiaries. In order to achieve these objectives, the Welsh Government expected RECs to work collaboratively with LAs, schools and other partners to develop effective interventions for improving the educational outcomes of LAC. Any delegation of funding to LAs or schools was expected to be exceptional and only where plans would be consistent with a regional approach.

8.3   This study has identified that not all the Welsh Government's expectations have been met. It has found that RECs have set strategic objectives and implemented a revised allocation process which has used some of the grant for strategic sustainable activities, such as building the capacity of teachers through training, and a large portion of the grant for supporting groups of LAC in LAs and school clusters which is responsive to their individual needs.

8.4   However, it has also found that the strategic approaches have delegated large amounts of the grant to either or both LAs and schools, that collaborative working has not been well-established in all areas, and that the use of the grant on effective interventions could be better evidenced. While there are similarities in REC's strategies and priorities which reflect the needs of LAC, there is no effective system being implemented in any of the RECs to plan, allocate and ensure accountability for the grant where it is delegated. This is particularly so where funding has been delegated to school clusters. Large variations in grant governance and resourcing arrangements can be found, as well as variations in the funding allocation processes used in each REC, across LAs within the same REC and across funding years.

8.5   Variations at REC, LA and school level in the way grant spending and outcomes are accounted for and gaps in the data on actual spending have made it difficult to assess how the grant was spent in 2015/16 and 2016/17 and what activities have contributed to any benefits for LAC.

8.6   Table 8.1: below assesses each aspect of the system for managing the grant, using evaluation framework set out in Figure 1.3:, drawing on the findings from the study to identify the extent to which the implementation of the PDG LAC has worked well.

Table 8.1: Main conclusions against evaluation indicators

Evaluative issues	Indicator	Assessment
Governance	Sufficient resourcing	**Not working well in general:**
		Variations in quantity, quality and continuity of REC, LA and school level resourcing to manage grant;
		Discontinuities in staffing in key roles (in RECs and LAs) and insufficient staff time contributing to gaps in reporting, communication and accountability for grant allocations.
	Partners engaged and accountable	**Not working well in some areas:**
		Wider stakeholder organisations, foster carers and LAC generally not consulted during planning and review stages;
		Presence of National Strategic Group and evidence of collaboration between RECs at national level, but varied regional and local governance arrangements leading to mixed levels of engagement of LACE coordinators and other stakeholders during REC level planning, grant allocation and grant monitoring processes;
		Little to no involvement of school representatives in REC and LA planning or grant allocation decision-making processes; and
		Some examples of best practice sharing structures/mechanisms but usually LA-LA, informal and ad-hoc.
	Communication between partners are clear and fit for purpose	**Not working well in some areas:**
		Welsh Government communications on grant changes and processes not always timely for planning purposes; guidance documents useful but require clarification and additional information;
		National stakeholder organisations, RECs and LACE coordinators are generally aware of the grant policy and priorities; mixed awareness among foster carers and school staff;
		Few formal communication mechanisms for disseminating information from RECs to LAs and school clusters; some regular information sharing between LACE coordinators.
Policy setting	Priorities regularly reviewed in line with guidance and evidence	**Working well in some areas:**
		REC priorities largely in line with guidance, available research evidence and practitioners' and national stakeholders' views;

Evaluative issues	Indicator	Assessment
		All RECs updating priorities/plans after monitoring and evaluating spend. Some evidence of RECs updating plans on the basis of the wider evidence base and practice in other RECs;
		Limited evidence of RECs or LAs adjusting planned activities on the basis of assessing value for money from previous expenditure or the wider evidence base on best practice.
	Priorities established, agreed and understood	**Working well in most areas:**
		Understanding, agreement and alignment of policy priorities at national, REC and LA level generally good;
		Priorities and processes for allocation not necessarily agreed with LAs and schools/other stakeholders and understood by them in all RECs;
		Alignment of REC level and school cluster level priorities less clear; large variations in the quality of cluster bids reported.
Allocation	Informed by evidence of need and what works	**Not working well in most areas:**
		Some evidence of REC and LA staff drawing on evidence of need to inform activities funded i.e. all/almost all bids for funding required information on identified needs but bid formats and assessment processes varied across RECs and LAs;
		Some evidence of REC and LA staff basing funding decisions on evidence of what works; more limited evidence that this is used by schools.
	Aligned with priorities and best practice	**Working well in some areas:**
		The majority of allocations appear to be in line with grant requirements and REC level guidance and priorities;
		Some funded activities (training, specialist staff recruitment and additional tuition) are in line with best practice;
		Some funded activities not in line with expectations for grant in relation to sustainability or substitution for LA corporate parent.
	Budgets are clear and expected outputs and outcomes are specified	**Not working well in all areas:**
		Significant variations in quality and availability of budgets at regional and LA level; and
		Considerable variation in clarity of expected outputs and outcomes in REC and LA level plans; generally absent.
	Grants used in line with expectations	**Evidence incomplete but not working well in some areas:**

Evaluative issues	Indicator	Assessment
		Limited reporting of actual spend on activities against planned spend; information generally absent;
		Where data available, a quarter of LAs reported considerable over or under-spends.
Monitoring and evaluation	Spend and outcomes tracked and monitored	**Not working well in most areas:**
		REC systems are in various forms and of poor quality: this has led to a lack of standardised reporting formats and metrics;
		Variations in the level and quality of monitoring of spend and outcomes at LA level;
		While schools generally track spend, most do not break down spend by activity type or monitor outcomes from spend despite claiming to have systems to monitor LAC education;
		Many interviewees in LAs and schools say they are confused over whose role it is to monitor spend and outcomes at each level and of reporting to higher levels.
	Assessment of value for money and sustainable outcomes	**Not working well in all areas:**
		Little to no evidence of RECs or LAs assessing value for money or the sustainability of the outcomes achieved from activities;
		Many interviewees in LAs and schools point to qualitative evidence of sustainable outcomes for individual LAC and staff supporting LAC.
	Grant recognised to be making a difference to LAC	**Working well in some areas:**
		Limited measured evidence of grant impact on LAC in general or those benefiting directly from specific activities;
		Consistent qualitative evidence that the grant has focused attention on LAC's educational needs, ensured a more strategic approach to supporting LAC through facilitating the sustainable upskilling of staff and building capacity in schools;
		Some qualitative evidence that the grant is having a direct impact on the wellbeing and educational attainment of LAC.

What are the reasons for this situation?

8.7 The following factors can be identified from the research as possible reasons for the shortcomings outlined above:

- **Availability of staff to lead and coordinate:** differences in the quality and continuity of leadership at REC and LA level have affected the strength of governance arrangements, financial systems and communication systems and

therefore the extent to which priorities and activities are well developed, understood and aligned at each level. Resourcing variations and discontinuities in posts being filled are also likely to have affected the ability to monitor and evaluate spending and outcomes from the grant.

- **The quality of working relations and collaboration between budget holders and grantees (WG and RECs, RECs and LAs and RECs/LAs and schools):** governance and communications by RECs and LAs have not always systematically engaged all key stakeholders, such as LACE coordinators and other representatives of LAC. This has affected the level of awareness and understanding of the grant; the alignment of priorities and the types of funded activities in some cases; the establishment of outputs and outcomes for monitoring grant activities; and the extent to which staff responsible for funded activities understand monitoring and evaluation requirements

- **Limited understanding of what works:** while there is some evidence of RECs and LAs basing funding decisions on what they understand to work to help to increase the educational attainment for LAC, this is more often based on other practitioners' views of best practice than research evidence and learning networks. This may be affected by evidence of best practice to support the educational attainment of LAC being in various guidance documents, the research evidence not generally being strong, and ad-hoc processes in place to identify and share best practice across RECs and LAs.

- **Inconsistent systems for grant disbursement:** varied funding disbursement structures have affected: the consistency and alignment of funded activities across RECs and LAs; the level of engagement of different stakeholders in planning, grant allocation and review of spend and impact; the ability to adequately assess need and select effective interventions; and the quality of monitoring and evaluation of spend and outcomes. These have also led to different levels of grant administration/bureaucracy at REC, LA and school level and differing levels of grant coverage (for example, not all school clusters bid for funding).

- **Poor systems for monitoring and reviewing grant allocations:** inadequate and absent systems for monitoring and evaluating grant spending has affected the extent to which the use and impact of the grant can be assessed. It has also affected the extent to which spending plans and priorities can be updated on the

basis of what works and monitored to prevent over or under-spends from occurring.

What would improve the grant process and the effective use of the grant?

8.8   The following could address most of the shortcomings identified above:

- **Availability of staff to lead and coordinate:** each REC should ensure a full-time REC lead is in place to undertake governance, communication and monitoring activities needed. At LA level, a full-time LACE coordinator should be in place as expected in all LAs and supported by other staff (dependent on the number of LAC in each LA and their support needs) in line with Welsh Government guidance to ensure LAC's education and attainment is a key focus of support[86]. At school level, a designated LAC lead should be present in all schools.

- **Better working arrangements between budget holders and grantees (WG and RECs, RECs and LAs/representatives of LAC and RECs/LAs and schools):** clearer and more timely guidance on grant priorities, allocations and use is required from the Welsh Government although RECs have authority to make preparations each year ahead of exact allocations given the Government's stated commitment to the PDG LAC. All RECs should have formal and consistent arrangements for engaging LACE coordinators, representatives of schools and other practitioners working with LAC and wider stakeholder groups (including LAC and foster carers) in planning and monitoring processes and communications about the grant and throughout the financial year.

- **Increasing understanding of what works and the needs of LAC:** at national level, the existing evidence of the most effective activities to improve the educational attainment of LAC needs to be in one place and updated on a regular basis and they key findings/best practice for LA and school staff communicated in a simplified form. There is also a need for stronger monitoring and evaluation processes particularly for RECs and LAs and a more systematic approach to engaging key school staff in learning about good practice.

- **Systems for managing grant allocations (decisions, implementation):** given the general alignment of grant priorities across regions, a national model for priority and target setting could be introduced with all RECs expected to follow a

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[86] Making a Difference, November 2017, pp7-9

similar disbursement and accounting process with grants allocated on condition of a resources delivery plan and agreed outputs and outcomes. This system should be supported by a standard system for monitoring and reviewing grant allocations. This should clarify roles and responsibilities, outcome measures (including LAC's wellbeing and attendance at school), and standard reporting with a simple focus on spending allocations, actual expenditure and outputs/outcomes reported against pre-defined activity categories to provide high level information for accountability, monitoring and review.

- **Systems of accountability**: RECs and LAs need to be more clearly accountable for how the grant and the exercise of corporate parenting roles is having a positive effect on the education of LAC. The Government could consider regional targets and annual reports on progress setting out the contribution of the grant towards the improvements achieved.

Would an alternative system work any better?

8.9   The new system of allocation has facilitated a more strategic approach to funding and is more clearly targeting LAC compared to pre-2015 arrangements. It has also improved awareness of the grant and raised the profile of LAC and their needs. However, given the variable quality of the systems developed across RECs, few of those involved agree that the funding arrangements have reduced bureaucracy and administrative burden or that the arrangements are necessarily fit for purpose.

8.10   The REC-led approach has the benefit of linking the grant to school improvement and the potential benefits of ensuring grant use is evidence based and sustainable and drawing together spending on activities such as training, networking and system development to achieve efficiencies. These were not fully realised by the end of 2016/17. Given the general alignment of regional and national priorities, a national rather than regional model for priority and target setting would help to standardise planning processes across RECs as would agreement on a national approach to monitoring and evaluation.

8.11   Alternative approaches, such as LA and school cluster level grant allocations, may appear to be less bureaucratic but would be less likely to be in line with strategic priorities and evidence of what works. It would also lead to smaller funding allocations that would limit the range of activities that could support LAC and not achieve any economies of scale with training and some specialist support. However, it is clear from the range of activities which can work that some are best delivered at

a regional level and some at a more local level including the LA and groups of schools. Interviewees in all organisations identified the benefits of holding some funding at REC level for training, monitoring and evaluation and networking, to facilitate a more strategic approach to capacity-building. However, spending on other capacity building activities, such as specialist supplementary staff to support LAC and on the provision of direct support for LAC appears to be more effectively delivered when held and managed at LA level rather than being entirely disbursed to schools or school clusters through bids or formula allocations.

9. Recommendations

9.1 To draw together recommendations for action from the conclusions, it is necessary to consider:

- Improvements to administration of the grant which are understood to have taken place since the beginning of 2017/18. These have included trying to stabilise and have more consistent REC staffing, having half termly meetings between Welsh Government officials and REC leads to monitor grant management and its expenditure, and providing support for REC leadership from the Welsh Government's Raising Attainment Advocate.

- The scale of the grant and the proportionality of measures to address the shortcomings identified: recommendations ought to be actionable by the staff resources available in the Welsh Government, RECs (one full time lead), and LAs (a LACE coordinator) and which do not add to existing expectations for disbursing and accounting for public monies.

Recommendations for WG (policy and practice)

9.2 The Welsh Government should:

- Release communications regarding grant changes, yearly priorities and funding totals to RECs before the start of the financial year.

- Develop a single, easy to read guidance document specifically for the PDG LAC to replace the Frequently Asked Questions guidance currently in existence. The guidance should be aimed at REC, LA and school level stakeholders and should include:

  o resourcing requirements for administering the grant at REC, LA and school level;

  o guidance on expected governance, collaboration and consultation, disbursement and accountability which reflects the agreed national model;

  o clarification on how LAs should support individuals who move away from the LA and on which pupils are covered by the funding (i.e. clearer definitions of beneficiary groups);

  o clarification of the expected outcomes of the grant in relation to the education of LAC: while educational outcomes are a key focus, the

guidance should make clear that wider wellbeing outcomes and attendance are also in scope; and

   o a clear statement on what the grant can be spent on and the most appropriate level for delivery which will be understood by RECs, LAs and schools.

- Draw together the evidence of what activities work in one place and keep this up to date. This guidance could be a standalone document or be included as an annex in the PDG LAC guidance document.

- Implement a national model for grant planning, implementation and evaluation to be reflected in the Guidance and in the grant terms and conditions as appropriate, to include:

   o Priority and target setting which should be undertaken at national level through the development of strong governance arrangements to involve REC and LA level stakeholders;

   o A proportion of the funding that should be retained at REC level for the REC lead post and activities that support regional leadership, learning and collaboration - ongoing training for teachers and foster carers, monitoring and evaluation, networking and best practice sharing activities;

   o Monitoring and evaluation guidance with clear information regarding who is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of spend and outcomes at each level (REC, LA and school) and on how monitoring and evaluation should be undertaken by different stakeholders (i.e. the types of evaluation methodologies to use for different activities). It should also include a set of standardised output and outcome measures that must be used by all RECs and LAs to report impact;

   o A standardised spreadsheet/report structure for RECs to provide accountability for the grant spent and information which can be easily collated to show what activities and to what ends (outputs and outcomes) the grant has been spent. RECs in turn will be able to use it to regularly track actual spend against planned spend, and capture outcomes measured for each activity type against standard indicators.

- Require RECs to report annually on their area's progress towards regional targets on improving the educational attainment of LAC with evidence of the contribution which the grant has made to this.

Recommendations for REC-level practitioners (practice)

9.3   RECs should:

- Ensure they are making plans for future years well before the end of the previous financial year and not waiting for exact allocations and grant letters to be issued.

- Ensure the existence of strong and consistent governance arrangements at REC level to facilitate decision making; accountability; and networking, information and best practice sharing with LACE coordinators and representatives of schools throughout the financial year. These arrangements should include consultation with foster carers and LAC.

- Ensure systematic communication strategies are in place to inform LACE coordinators, school staff and wider stakeholders of regional plans, REC level provision, and processes for accessing funding which is delegated or open for bids.

- Provide support to schools for cluster bids if these are given allocations, ensure cluster agreement to delivery and improve the efficiency of bid processes.

- Adopt the proposed national model and meet reporting arrangements to account for the added value of the grant in future years.

Recommendations for LAs and schools (practice)

9.4   LAs should:

- Ensure they have a designated LACE coordinator whose role reflects the responsibilities set out in Welsh Government guidance.

- Ensure alignment of LACE coordinator staff/teams with other relevant teams within the LA to ensure close working arrangements.

- Participate in Welsh Government and REC level governance arrangements for the grant and support the REC lead to develop and deliver regional activities funded by the grant.

- Ensure any LA level activities funded by the grant are sustainable and can be delivered to meet agreed outputs and outcomes.

- Regularly assess need within the LA through close work with LAC and previously LAC, and regular collaboration with school staff, foster carers and social workers.

- Comply with reporting arrangements to account for the use of the grant and its added value where funding is delegated.

9.5   Schools/school clusters should:

- Ensure they have a designated LAC lead in schools who is a member of the senior management team responsible for delivering the school's LAC strategy, and a designated governor with a strong understanding of the needs of LAC.

- Improve their networking and engagement with foster carers to ensure awareness and engagement in grant funding e.g. encouraging teachers to discuss PDG LAC spending with carers during parents' evenings and ensuring LAC leads in schools are monitoring and encouraging foster carer engagement.

- Comply with reporting arrangements to account for the use of the grant and its added value where funding is delegated.

- Ensure any school level activities funded by the grant are sustainable and can be delivered to meet agreed outputs and outcomes.

Annexes

Annex A: Literature review references

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