

Minister for Education meeting with the Third Sector
Thursday 3 December 2020
12:00 – 13:15

Attendees

Welsh Government:

Kirsty Williams MS, Minister for Education **(KW)**
Donna Lemin
Kelly Murphy
Dewi Knight
Matthew Mithan (Note Taker)

Third Sector

Ben Lloyd, WCVA **(BL)**
Kathryn Robson, Adult Learning Wales
Catrin James, CWVYS / Urdd Gobaith Cymru **(CJ)**
Susie Ventris Field, Welsh Centre for International Affairs **(SVF)**
Rebecca Falvey, Business in the Community **(RF)**
Kevin Rahman-Daultrey, Size of Wales
Gwendolyn Sterk, Welsh Women's Aid
Felicite Walls, WCVA **(FW)**
Sian Rees, Interfaith Council for Wales
Kay Smith, Learning and Work Institute
Sean O'Neill, Children in Wales **(SO)**
David Smith, Co-ops and Mutuals Wales **(DS)**
Paul Glaze, CWVYS
Vikki Cornish, Welsh Assembly for Women **(VC)**
Elin Maher, Mentrau Iaith Cymru **(EM)**
Ginger Wiegand, EYST **(GW)**

Apologies

Marianne Mannello, Play Wales
Gethin Rhys, Interfaith Council for Wales
Bryn Hall, Clinks
Elspeth Jones, Size of Wales
Caroline Rawson, Snap Cymru

Item 1 – Minutes and Actions of the last meeting

KW – All actions had been completed and minutes agreed by all. Also grateful for the two papers which had been provided by the Third Sector for this meeting.

Item 2 – Links between youth volunteering and the school system

FW – Following consultation with the youth volunteering network, advised the general feedback had been positive in the way volunteering works complemented the Welsh Bacc and through school council meetings. However the pandemic had an adverse effect on the voluntary sector as a whole.

KW – Recognised the importance of volunteering and was grateful for the positive feedback received on the success of the Welsh Bacc in assisting volunteering. Impressed with how many young people across Wales showed a willingness to play their part in communities during the pandemic, leading to them being part of the community resilience to assist the more vulnerable groups within society. The new curriculum was evidence of the Welsh Government's commitment to re-inventing the Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) for pupils, however assistance from the Third Sector with this would be very welcome.

BL – Confirmed the Third Sector would be happy to engage with Welsh Government officials on this matter wherever possible.

SVF – Requested clarification on whether or not it would be possible to make the Zoom platform available to schools in Wales as opposed to Microsoft Teams.

KW – Agreed to ask officials to explore what options were available and report back to the Third Sector.

- **Action** – Chris Owen to look into the availability of Zoom in schools as opposed to Microsoft Teams. Welsh Government to update Third Sector.

Item 3 – Equalities impact of the coronavirus restrictions and school closures

GW – Raised concerns of a digital divide with various groups of children within society, most notable affecting those in Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. The third sector had also been informed of difficulties encountered by non-Welsh speaking parents of Welsh medium pupils unable to assist their child with their work.

RF – Suggested there had been evidence of schools in the Newport area struggling to obtain adequate technology for their pupils.

EM – Highlighted positive examples of IT equipment being re-purposed effectively by schools and asked if there were any further updates on the future availability of IT for schools.

KW – Set out the Welsh Government's ongoing work with Local Authorities to provide adequate IT equipment to schools. Orders had been placed to further improve the equipment already available to schools, however delays had been

experienced from suppliers due to the equipment's popularity worldwide. The Welsh Government had also set up a group with the WLGA to identify issues with using IT to continue learning, including through distance learning. The Government were continuing to provide schools with as much flexibility as possible to ensure they could bring children into schools.

SO – Believed the pandemic had highlighted the importance of access to school for children to offer respite for any issues at home and to provide free school meals. Welcomed the Welsh Government approach to Free School Meals, however wanted the eligibility criteria expanded further.

DS – Enquired whether the Welsh Government had planned for any possible disruptions to the food supply chain when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

KW – Confirmed that as part of the Welsh Government's resilience work, discussions had already been held with local authorities across Wales to try and encourage more sourcing of local produce as opposed to relying on imported food. The Welsh Government had already made more than £50m available to local authorities to ensure the Free School Meals programme continued in Wales. The current commitment would continue until the Easter holidays, and discussions were ongoing on future finances. More children than ever were benefiting from the scheme, and additional information, due to come forward in the Spring-term, would be considered to ensure all information was available before making the next decision. The threshold for the eligibility criteria would be kept under review.

CJ – Highlighted the excellent commitment shown by youth workers during the pandemic.

EM – Explained the difficulties encountered by non-Welsh speaking parents unable to assist children from Welsh medium schools with their work as much as they would like to due to language barriers in learning.

KW – Commended the commitment shown by youth workers across Wales during the pandemic and emphasised the immense importance of their relationships with the young people they worked with. Schools were now more aware than ever of the importance of youth work. Former Children's Commissioner Keith Towler currently chaired the Interim Youth Work board and would shortly be reporting back to the Minister on the future of youth work in Wales. The Welsh Government had allocated funding specifically aimed at assisting those pupils in Welsh medium schools who had not had the opportunity to speak Welsh at home during the pandemic. Additional resources had also been made available on the Hwb learning platform to support parents who were not Welsh speakers, but had children in Welsh medium education. Highlighted the importance of promoting Welsh medium education as much as possible.

VC – Expressed her concern that Universities may favour students from outside Wales due to the Minister’s recent announcement of no end of year exams for students studying subjects approved by Qualifications Wales.

KW – Explained Welsh students would still have the same qualifications as those of their counterparts outside of Wales. Universities inside and outside Wales were fully consulted before the decision and indicated their preference was to maximise teaching time. The feedback received from Universities also highlighted their confidence in the Welsh system as the qualifications would still be awarded by an independent body.

The meeting then drew to a close with the Minister thanking everyone for all their hard work throughout the pandemic.