



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#)

[The Children, Young People and Education
Committee](#)

13/07/2016

[Agenda'r Cyfarfod](#)

[Meeting Agenda](#)

[Trawsgrifiadau'r Pwyllgor](#)

[Committee Transcripts](#)

Cynnwys Contents

- 3 Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions
- 3 Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg—Trafod Blaenoriaethau'r
Portffolio
Cabinet Secretary for Education—Discussion on Portfolio Priorities
- 28 Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gymunedau a Phlant: Trafod
Blaenoriaethau'r Portffolio
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children—Discussion on
Portfolio Priorities
- 50 Papur i'w Nodi
Paper to Note
- 50 Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42(ix) i Benderfynu Gwahardd y
Cyhoedd o Weddill y Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to Resolve to Exclude the
Public from the Remainder of the Meeting

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

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

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Mohammad Asghar Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Michelle Brown Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Mark Reckless) UKIP Wales (substitute for Mark Reckless)
Hefin David Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
John Griffiths Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Llyr Gruffydd Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Darren Millar Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Julie Morgan Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Lynne Neagle Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Jo-Anne Daniels	Cyfarwyddwr, Cymunedau a Threchu Tlodi, Llywodraeth Cymru Director, Communities and Tackling Poverty, Welsh Government
Owen Evans	Dirprwy Ysgrifennydd Parhaol, Addysg a Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus, Llywodraeth Cymru Deputy Permanent Secretary, Education and Public Services, Welsh Government
Albert Heaney	Cyfarwyddwr Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol ac Integreiddio, Llywodraeth Cymru Director, Social Services and Integration, Welsh Government
Huw Morris	Cyfarwyddwr Sgiliau, Addysg Uwch a Dysgu Gydol Oes, Llywodraeth Cymru Director of Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, Welsh Government
Carl Sargeant Bywgraffiad Biography	Aelod Cynulliad, Llafur (Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gymunedau a Phlant)

Steve Vincent	Assembly Member, Labour (The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children) Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr, Rheolaeth ac Effeithiolrwydd Ysgolion, Llywodraeth Cymru Deputy Director, School Management and Effectiveness, Welsh Government
Kirsty Williams Bywgraffiad Biography	Aelod Cynulliad, Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg) Assembly Member, Welsh Liberal Democrats (The Cabinet Secretary for Education)

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

Sarah Bartlett	Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk
Michael Dauncey	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Steve Davies	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Sian Hughes	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Marc Wyn Jones	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:30.
The meeting began at 09:30.

Cyflwyniadau, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introductions, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Lynne Neagle:** Good morning. I'd like to welcome Michelle Brown, who is substituting for Mark Reckless today.

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Addysg—Trafod Blaenoriaethau'r
Portffolio
Cabinet Secretary for Education—Discussion on Portfolio Priorities

[2] **Lynne Neagle:** I'm also really pleased to welcome Kirsty Williams, the Cabinet Secretary, here to our meeting today. We're grateful to you for

coming to meet with us and also for providing a paper for the meeting. If I could just ask you to introduce your officials for the record, and then, if you'd like to make some opening remarks on your priorities.

[3] **The Cabinet Secretary for Education (Kirsty Williams):** Thank you. And good morning.

[4] Diolch yn fawr, a diolch yn fawr am y gwahoddiad y bore yma. Thank you very much, and thank you very much for the invitation this morning.

[5] It's a great pleasure to be able to join you here. As it's our first meeting of the new committee, can I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Chair, on your election to Chair? I look forward to working with colleagues across the committee in the years to come on what I'm sure is a shared passion to ensure that we get education, in all its forms, right for all of our children. I have here with me today Owen Evans, who is the deputy permanent secretary for the education and public services group. Steve Vincent is the deputy director, school management and effectiveness, and Huw Morris is the director of higher education skills and lifelong learning.

[6] Well, there is so much lying ahead of us. In terms of education reform in Wales, I'm pleased to say that I have been able to agree a number of priorities with the First Minister. And I thought, this morning, building on what my oral statement said yesterday, I would try and add to that. So, you will all know that I feel very strongly about the issue of class sizes. It remains a concern for teachers and for parents, so, as I have previously said, I have asked my officials to scope out options to reduce class sizes, starting with the largest classes first.

[7] The second element of my agreement with the First Minister is ensuring that every child gets the best start in life through an expanded pupil premium. Breaking the cycle of deprivation and attainment is a long-term commitment, and I intend to ensure a continued focus on supporting disadvantaged learners in Wales.

[8] Thirdly, prioritising schools' access to superfast broadband within the national programme. There are still schools in Wales that aren't getting the same quality of broadband connection as other schools around the country. I'm in the process of looking at those schools, and if superfast broadband connections might be available to them. Local authorities will be brought on

board to ensure that improved services are provided as soon as possible to those schools that are not currently meeting the Government's own targets for access to superfast broadband. It's essential that schools have this infrastructure capability; with so much emphasis being placed in our developing new curriculum around digital competency, it's absolutely crucial that schools have access to that important infrastructure.

[9] Fourthly, incentivising, recognising and promoting teaching excellence so that we raise standards across the board. I am very much motivated by the principle that we need to let teachers teach and leaders lead in their schools. There's been much work already done to recognise and promote teaching excellence through the new deal, through the Furlong report, 'Teaching Tomorrow's Teachers', and I hope to build on that work to see what we can do to enhance that, which will form part of the strategy that I announced yesterday—a new workforce and leadership strategy.

[10] On promoting and enhancing both academic and vocational routes, we know that if the Welsh economy is to be successful, we have to equip our learners with the best education, and our workers, and our workers of the future, with the right skills, and this means widening access and tailoring courses to suit the needs of the Welsh economy.

[11] I want to look at the impact of current policy on surplus school places, with a particular emphasis on rural schools to better take account of future growth needs. There are a number of issues encompassed within this priority. We have to look not only at surplus school places, but also at defining rural schools and the development of a rural schools policy. So, there's much to be discussed under that particular priority. I also recognise, as I said in the Chamber yesterday, that the surplus place policy has not only had an impact in rural areas; actually, it has had an impact in more urban areas also.

[12] I want to consult further on the specific on the specific recommendations of the Hazelkorn review. Members will be aware of the decision in July of last year by the former Minister to undertake the Hazelkorn review. That was published in March of this year, prior to the election. Now more than ever, our educational institutions in Wales must step up to the plate, and I'll be looking very carefully at the recommendations in Hazelkorn and, after fully considering them, I will come back to the Chamber and, indeed, this committee, if the committee sees fit, to discuss a way forward with regard to that.

[13] I want to explore the potential expansion of the remit of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol to include further education. That is very much tied up with consideration of Hazelkorn, and I want to look at whether there are benefits to be accrued by expanding the college, and how any additional responsibilities would work on a practical level. I want to prioritise support for enhanced links between education and industry, enabling innovation and entrepreneurship across our public and private sectors in collaboration with not just schools, but universities and colleges. We have to really encourage conversations between learners and employers, sectors and institutions. Now, this is at an early stage, but it is vital that we get this right if we want the economy to prosper.

[14] So, that's just a flavour of the nine priorities that I've agreed with the First Minister. It builds on the statement that I made to the Chamber yesterday. I recognise that many of the building blocks have been put in train to raise standards of education and training. I truly believe that Welsh education is on the up, but I acknowledge that there is much more to do. We need to increase the pace of improvement and change. There are challenging times ahead, but I look forward to that challenge.

[15] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you very much to the Cabinet Secretary for those opening remarks. So, we'll have an opportunity now for discussion with Members. The first question is from Oscar Asghar.

[16] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thanks, Kirsty, for telling us all this little brief that you just mentioned. According to your own party manifesto, you were saying you would be setting aside £42 million for infant and young children class sizes to be shortened. The First Minister only recently said that there'd be a £100 million pot. Do you think that that money will come from that pot while you're in the Cabinet now?

[17] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you for the question, Oscar. As with all Cabinet colleagues, I am embarking on a series of discussions with the finance Minister around the budgets for the department in the next financial year. Those meetings are at an early stage. What I can say is that we will be negotiating hard with the Minister for finance to ensure that we have the resources within the department to deliver on the priorities and promises that I have made and I have just outlined. Those discussions are at an early stage, but I am confident that, from within my own resources, which we'll be looking to realign against these priorities, as well as additional commitments

that I hope to be able to bring into the department's budget, we'll be able to deliver on these priorities.

[18] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Llyr Gruffydd.

[19] **Llyr Gruffydd:** You touched yesterday on some of the issues around this, of course, this policy of yours, and you acknowledged that it isn't just about money for more teachers, necessarily. I'm not sure whether I should declare an interest as a school governor—I probably should—but I can think of at least one example where there are real physical constraints in terms of school buildings, and if you were to move from having two classes to having three, then they'd probably need a new school. So, how are you hoping to address some of those issues? If your answer is—and I probably shouldn't pre-empt your answer—but if you were to tell me, 'Well, we can look at classroom assistants', well, they have classroom assistants, so what's different?

[20] **Kirsty Williams:** Llyr, as you say, this is a complex policy area. What is important, having listened very carefully to the views of teachers and indeed to the views of parents, is that class sizes is an important issue for them. There are some real challenges in how we reduce class sizes. You've just outlined one of those challenges—the physical constraints, perhaps, of a building. There are others, and I acknowledge that. That's why I have asked officials, as I said yesterday, to scope a range of options about how we can address this. We look to start with our largest classes first. We do know that some classes—permitted, it's not that people are acting in a way that is illegal or doing it outside the auspices of the local authority—but we do know that we have classes over 30. We need to look at a range of options and how we can bring class sizes down. It may be that we're able to, in some cases, do something about physical space, but it's more than just bricks and mortar; it is about being able to have the resources in a school to look at additional teaching staff or additional learning support staff. So, there's a range of ways.

[21] There's not one answer to solving this problem. But it's important. It's important because it matters to teachers. We know from the research by De Montfort University that class size has a big impact on the ability to recruit and retain teaching staff. A huge impact on morale. If you just read last week's *The Times Educational Supplement*, you will see that there's a direct correlation—I can't even say it; there's a direct link, that's a better word—there is a direct link between levels of sickness and staff absence and issues

around class sizes and sizes of schools. So, it's important for teachers, it's important for parents, we know it makes the biggest difference to our poorest children. So, this policy works in conjunction with our commitment to the pupil deprivation grant because we know it makes the biggest difference to poorer children.

[22] It makes the biggest difference to those children whose first language is not Welsh. We know, in many areas of our biggest cities, schools are teaching a cohort of children who come from a wide variety of backgrounds, whose home languages—I went to one school recently where there were 10 or 15 home languages of children in that particular school. We know it makes a difference to those children as well, and to our youngest children. So, there are reasons to do it. There's no one simple answer and solution to doing it. That's why officials are scoping out a whole range.

[23] **Llyr Gruffydd:** So, it may not necessarily be reducing the size of the class. It could actually be providing more staffing resource within that classroom.

[24] **Kirsty Williams:** It could be in some circumstances, if that's appropriate and that is the best way in which we can address the issue of workload. What we do know—again, talking to teachers—because of difficult constraints, we know that some schools have had to lose their teaching assistants. It's often the one place where people are able to make savings within their school budgets. As a governor, you would know that. When savings have to be made, it is often the human resource that is the easiest way to take money out of your system. So, it could very well be that we need to invest in learning support assistants. As I said yesterday, I'm looking at prioritising career pathways and training opportunities and resourcing a move to higher level teaching assistants. That's one way in which we can ensure we've got the right skills working alongside qualified teaching staff to be able to free up teachers then to be able to work in smaller groups with children—set the agenda. So, there's not one way of solving this issue.

[25] **Lynne Neagle:** I've got Julie Morgan next, then Darren Millar.

[26] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you. Cabinet Secretary, you said that you'd been speaking to teachers and parents and that they raised this concern about the classes. I wondered if you could expand on that in terms of what people in Wales have directly said to you, because my information, from the headteachers and teachers I've spoken to is that they have said, 'Yes, it

would be nice to have smaller classes', but they didn't actually see that as an educational priority. I wondered what your comment would be on that.

[27] **Kirsty Williams:** I'm surprised, Julie, because I've yet to come across a headteacher or a classroom teacher who said that class sizes weren't important to them. In fact, as schools in some parts of Wales are sent their indicative budgets for the forthcoming years, they're having to move to larger classes and that's a source of great, great concern to them. It's a great source of concern to me in terms of the impact on standards. So, what teachers say to me is that, with a large class size or a large class without the ability to work alongside a learning support assistant, they simply cannot differentiate between the different needs of children in that class. In some of our schools, we're asking teachers to teach in a large class with mixed age groups, which is an added challenge. Not only have you got a large class, you have to differentiate between the pupils who are in year 6 and are in year 5, which is an added challenge to being able to really make an impact on those individual children.

09:45

[28] Is it the only way in which we can raise standards in our schools? Of course it isn't. If we have a poorly trained, poorly motivated teacher in front of a class, it wouldn't, I suppose, matter very much if the class had 10 in it, you know. So, it is not the only way in which we need to raise standards. But I would point you to the research that says it does make a difference to the recruitment and retention of good staff, it makes a difference to our poorest children, those children who don't have English as a first language, and our youngest children. So, the message I receive from teachers and parents is that it is an important issue. It's not the only issue they want to see us tackle, but it is something they want us to deal with.

[29] **Julie Morgan:** I wanted to flag up what people had said to me—

[30] **Kirsty Williams:** Of course, sure.

[31] **Julie Morgan:** And a lot of the schools don't have mixed-age groups, so that isn't an issue for them. But, as I say, they didn't see it as a priority. So, thank you.

[32] **Lynne Neagle:** Darren Millar.

[33] **Darren Millar:** Yes, just two very brief questions. Will some schools have less cash in their budgets as a result of this policy? Presumably, if they've currently got 30 in a class and they don't have the capital requirements in terms of increasing the size of their school—it's just not physically possible—and they have to reduce down to 25, that'll mean less cash for that school. And it could potentially have a big impact on that school, couldn't it?

[34] **Kirsty Williams:** Darren, this policy is designed to assist schools, assist school leaders, and classroom teachers. It is not a policy that is designed to penalise schools. That's why officials are looking very carefully at a range of options, rather than just charging ahead with a simple policy that says, 'You have to reduce your intake'. That's why we're looking at a range of options for doing it, because we do not want there to be any unintended consequences of trying to address the issue of teacher workload.

[35] **Darren Millar:** So, no school will lose out in terms of its finances as a result of this policy?

[36] **Kirsty Williams:** That is not my intention, and officials and I will be working very hard, as I said, to ensure that there are no unintended consequences as a result of an effort to try and address workload. And that's why we will look at a range of options in terms of implementing it, not simply a simple thing, which would be to restrict people's intake into their schools.

[37] **Darren Millar:** And just in terms of this £42 million figure, where did that figure come from?

[38] **Kirsty Williams:** Ah, the £42 million figure that was contained within the Welsh Liberal Democrat manifesto was the best attempts of the Members' Research Service here at the National Assembly for Wales, in conjunction with the parliamentary service in Westminster, and Scotland, and Northern Ireland, to give a best estimate of how we would be able to arrive at a costing. So, it was independently done in conjunction with parliamentary researchers across the UK. It's not an easy figure to come to, but that was the best attempts of those—independent of the party—to try and price out the policy.

[39] **Darren Millar:** You'll be able to circulate that to committee members, will you, so they can have a look at it—the basis on which it was estimated?

[40] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, it's not a Cabinet paper, it's not a Government paper. You would have to refer your request, I suspect, to the Welsh Liberal Democrats.

[41] **Darren Millar:** Well, you are the Welsh Liberal Democrats.

[42] **Lynne Neagle:** Darren, Darren, Darren.

[43] **Kirsty Williams:** No, I'm not the leader of the Welsh Liberal Democrats, and I'm not the chairman of the national executive council of the Welsh Liberal Democrats.

[44] **Lynne Neagle:** We'll be returning to this as a committee, anyway. John Griffiths.

[45] **John Griffiths:** Chair, I wanted to widen the discussion, in terms of community-focused schools at this stage, if that's okay, in terms of raising standards. Because I think there's a lot of evidence that, in order to improve our educational results and achievements in Wales, it's very necessary to work with parents and the wider community as well as pupils. And I think it's quite patchy in terms of community-focused schools. I think it works quite well in some areas, where they have built these partnerships, and the schools are open to the community and they get a range of organisations in to add value to the educational experience in a variety of ways—sport, culture, and others. And, you know, it really is conducive to working with families, the wider family, and the community. And also, of course, it makes use of those school buildings at holiday time, evenings and weekends, whereas, otherwise, they may lie idle.

[46] So, I think there's a lot of plusses from the community-focused school approach, but I do believe it's very patchy across Wales. I know it's in the early stages of your tenure as Cabinet Secretary for Education, but I just wonder whether you'd been able to give any thought as to how we might find mechanisms to ensure that all of our schools, across Wales, become community focused and build these important partnerships with parents and the wider community.

[47] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, thank you, John, and I think the point you raise is absolutely crucial because, if we're to raise educational standards across Wales, that is a job for Welsh Government, it's a job for local education authorities, it's a job for individual schools, but parents and communities

have a huge role to play in being able to help us do that job. I want to see an increased role for parents in Welsh education. I'm looking at models by which we could be able to engage parents in more of a national discussion; there are some interesting models in Scotland that I'm currently looking at.

[48] But you're absolutely right: some of the outstanding work that some schools are doing, in particular with using their pupil deprivation grant money, is where they have been able to establish genuine links out into the community. So, yesterday, I visited the Tremorfa Nursery School, just here in Cardiff. They have used their early years pupil deprivation grant to appoint someone who spends a great deal of time engaging with the local community and running activities in that nursery school. There are some children who have been attending that nursery with their mums and dads since they were literally a few days old—literally a few days old—because that school has a community room, they run 'tea and toast' mornings, they run mother and dad baby groups, those children then graduate, as soon as they're walking, into the toddler group, and they work really, really hard with all the other partnerships in the area. So, that kind of model—and if we look at excellent use of pupil deprivation grant in the primary and in the secondary sector, they're using that money to get out into the community, to have those conversations with parents and engage those parents in their education.

[49] I recently launched the Ready to Learn programme for Welsh Government—again, very much an emphasis on trying to build relationships with parents to help them get their children ready for school. So, I think there are lots and lots and lots of possibilities, through engaging parents, engaging the wider community, engaging industry—I recently visited, with Hefin, his old school, actually, Heolddu, and GE were there that day, working on some lessons with the school. Recently, with the First Minister, I visited Sony, where Sony had been having local schools come into their innovation plant to look at coding and technology careers in that field. So, when I talk about 'community focused', I don't want to just talk about parents; I want to talk about the wider community in its fullest sense—working with local employers and organisations to be able to give children a very broad range of experiences that actually make connections for them between what they're learning and future aspirations they may have for their lives. But involving parents, and getting parents in, is crucial, especially where parents have had a negative experience in their own education. That can be a really big barrier to them getting engaged with their own children's education.

[50] **John Griffiths:** Could I just quickly follow, if I may, Chair? That's very

encouraging, but I just think that, at a time when that isn't much resource around for new build—although we still have a substantial programme, thankfully—it's very frustrating to see some school buildings not being used at evenings, weekends, and in holidays. Sometimes, you hear that it's just seen as an additional factor, an additional responsibility, that maybe the headteacher doesn't particularly want to engage with because they feel they've got a lot of other things to do that they regard as more of the mainstream educational offer that they're responsible for delivering. Sometimes, it's about, you know, the caretaker wants an extra payment and it's not catered for in the school budget, or there are issues around security and the safety of the site and so on. But all of these issues, I think, are easily overcome, and I just wonder if you might think of some mechanism whereby we could be confident that all schools in Wales will open up to the community and parents as some currently do.

[51] **Kirsty Williams:** John, I'm very willing to look at that to assess to what level this lack of engagement is actually happening. I must say, from my own experience, in my own backyard, I know local high schools that have taken on the provision of the local leisure facilities because the local council would have closed them, and, without the schools stepping up to the plate and saying, 'We're going to run those,' those facilities would be lost. I can think of a high school in my own constituency that has just used some of its building. It hosts the local gym and it hosts the local youth club after school. It's about to take on the local library; otherwise, the library will close in that particular location. So, the library is locating to the school. So, I think, in my experience, rather than headteachers being curmudgeonly and saying, 'Oh, we haven't got time to do this', I come across people all the time who are absolutely anxious, because they see it as being of benefit to their school and their pupils to play that wider role in their community. If there are barriers to doing that, I'd like to know about them, and then we can see what we can do to address those barriers, so that all schools can play that kind of role in their community.

[52] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. I want to move—. [*Interruption.*] No, Darren. No, I want to move on now, otherwise we're not going to cover the other areas.

[53] **Darren Millar:** It's just on the barriers.

[54] **Lynne Neagle:** No, no, no. We're not going to—. We'll return to this in future. We need to move on now to the pupil deprivation grant. Can I just ask

Members to ask their questions succinctly, please? Julie.

[55] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you, Chair. Breaking the cycle of poverty and deprivation I know is one of your great aims, and I think we're all behind you on that. The pupil deprivation grant is one of the ways that it has been addressed. Could you tell us the evidence of its success so far?

[56] **Kirsty Williams:** I guess there are many ways in which we can look at the impact of PDG, but the strongest piece of evidence is that, last year, for the first time ever, we saw a closing in the attainment gap at GCSE level between our children that are on free school meals and their counterparts who are not. That is the first time that that has ever, ever happened. There was a 3.9 percentage point increase in pupils who attained the level 2 inclusive threshold in 2014–15 GCSEs. So, you know, that test is being passed.

[57] We also know that we have already exceeded the target that the previous Government set itself for our foundation phase children. So, the previous administration had a target, which was to reduce the attainment gap by 10 per cent over the 2012 figure by 2017. We've already done it. We've already surpassed that in terms of early years. We are having to set ourselves a new target to see how far we can push ourselves. Research shows that improvements in this category—. We're seeing improvements across the board, but improvements in this category—for free school meals—is happening faster. We know that the number of children who are not attending school who are on free school meals is dropping. So, these children are in school more often. We know that these children who are on free school meals are being excluded less often than they previously were. So, on a range of indicators, we can see that this resource is making a difference.

[58] It's not just the money, Julie. It's not just the money. We have changed the conversation in our schools around the attainment levels of these particular children. We have made it important. That change of dialogue, that change of conversation, is really focusing schools' attention on what they can do for this cohort of children. They are showing incredible commitment to driving up standards. We are seeing an increasingly sophisticated use of the money, which is being reported on. Independent research by Cardiff University has demonstrated the impact that it is having. It is quite difficult, because, you know, we can't run an experiment where we have some children on free school meals who we don't give pupil deprivation grants to,

and some children that we do. So, in that sense, we can't run a study of that kind to compare and contrast. But what we do know is that, this group of children, their grades are improving quicker than everybody else's. But we have still got a way to go.

[59] **Julie Morgan:** I think that's very encouraging. The independent research that you mentioned, by Cardiff University: is that something that's ongoing? Is this being independently evaluated as you go along? I realise you can't have a core group that has, and that doesn't—but is this ongoing research?

[60] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, I'm not sure about the ongoing Cardiff research. It continues to be a focus for Estyn inspections. So, as a part of Estyn's routine inspections of individual schools, local authorities and consortia, the use of PDG is an ongoing focus of their work. But I'm not clear, and I will have to write to you—. I think that that was maybe a bespoke piece of research by the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods, but I will write to you to let you know if that is ongoing.

[61] **Julie Morgan:** It would be really good, if this is being so successful, that we are researching it as it goes along. Two quick questions, because I know we have to move on as swiftly as possible: the expanded pupil deprivation grant, if you could highlight what you are thinking of there, and the finances for it.

10:00

[62] **Kirsty Williams:** There is a commitment between myself and the First Minister to expand the pupil deprivation—I can't even speak this morning—deprivation grant. We are in difficult budgetary terms. This is already a very significant, high-priced ticket item that has been, in previous years, paid for out of the central pot. I will be negotiating with the finance Minister about what resources will be available for the pupil deprivation grant, and taking advice from the profession, and from officials, about, if there is room for expansion, where we can get the most value where we can expand it.

[63] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you.

[64] **Lynne Neagle:** Hefin on this.

[65] **Hefin David:** Diolch. I'm in the process of meeting with the heads of

the secondary schools in my constituency, just holding general discussions. One of the issues raised is that parents who find short-term work become no longer eligible for free school meals, and then, when those contracts end, they're not then re-registering for free school meals, and therefore pupils are kind of dropping out of the system. I just wondered if you could reflect on that in the context of inclusivity in the pupil deprivation grant.

[66] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, I certainly will reflect on that, Hefin. As I said, we're looking at what we can do to refresh PDG—are we using it to best effect, what can we do next? So, I'm very willing to take that on board. We will also have to reflect on changes to the benefits system from the Westminster Government, where, actually, the rolling out of universal credit can make it quite difficult to identify, potentially, people who are on free school meals. So, there are some very technical issues, as well as policy input issues, that we're having to look at at the moment, and I'm willing to look at that.

[67] **Hefin David:** Thank you.

[68] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. We'll move on now then to the issue of teaching excellence. Oscar.

[69] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much indeed, Chair, again. The thing is we are having reports from various professors, and one professor is Professor Hazelkorn, and the report is that it is still a very hard nut to crack. We are not heading towards teachers where—. The teachers actually need more training, more professional training, to teach our next generation. What my question to you is—. That also already directly makes an impact on our economy. It's just a word of caution. I am personally friendly with teachers, who give me input, apart from what is written here, that teachers are inundated with other activities, rather than teaching children. That is the area, Minister, which you have to consider very seriously. Our teachers are very good teachers in schools. They need training, continuous training, yes, but the thing is one-off training is not good. Continuous training: that's one. And let our children have their own aptitude tested—tested, rather than an examination—which teachers should be giving you, year on year, to make sure our children are getting the full potential of their life. That is your objective. So, my question to you is: the recommendations of this professor, how far have they gone, and are you going to accept all their recommendations, or are you going to add or subtract something?

[70] **Kirsty Williams:** First of all, with regard to Professor Hazelkorn's work, as I said in my opening statement, we are currently analysing that report, and we will come forward shortly with a statement on how we intend to take that forward. Perhaps of more interest to the Member would be where we are with Professor Furlong's report into training teachers. We know that initial teacher training is not what we would want it to be. And we are driving forward the recommendations of Furlong in terms of reforms to initial teacher training. That then has to coincide with recognising that many of our teachers are currently in the system, so we need to get the initial teacher training right for people who are going to come into the profession, but, actually, we have a massive cohort of teachers who are already in the profession, and we are looking to see what we can do to beef up the new deal. Some work has been started on that, but is it really in tune with what we need the continual professional development of teachers to be like?

[71] I announced yesterday my intention to set up a leadership academy to look at supporting the next generation of school leaders. And this will all form part of the workforce and learning strategy that I announced yesterday, bringing it all under one umbrella, because, at the moment, we've got a strategy here for this bit and a strategy here for this bit, and a bit over here for this bit, and it's in danger of being very disjointed, and, of course, these things all flow together, because we want people coming into the profession, developing their skills, going on to be the senior leadership team, and then going on to be heads, and then executive heads, under the model that we would like.

[72] I'm committed to doing what we can with regard to workload. That's part of the reason we're focusing on class sizes. But we will be working with the profession to look at what we can do as part of a bureaucracy audit to say, 'Well, what are you spending your time on? Is it adding value to your work and if it's not, let us have some specifics and if we can simplify the system for you, then I'm ready and willing to simplify that system.'

[73] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Hefin next and can I remind Members again to be brief in their questions and then we'll get more questions in.

[74] **Hefin David:** Okay. Well, I'd say to Oscar that he shouldn't be sceptical about recommendations from academics—they can be very helpful. I should also declare an interest that up until Monday I'm employed by Cardiff Metropolitan University as a senior lecturer, when my contract comes to an end.

[75] On the role of teacher training, it's very encouraging to hear that you're looking at that and reviewing provision. I've met with people who provide autistic support in my constituency and I've spoken to the alliance of deaf organisations in Wales and one of the concerns that they've raised is that teacher-training modules don't have enough in them—teacher-training degrees and qualifications like the postgraduate certificate in education and bachelor of education degrees—about additional learning needs. Would you like to comment on that?

[76] **Kirsty Williams:** I absolutely recognise that feedback from the profession. As I said yesterday in my statement, we are looking at the additional learning needs legislation that we're bringing forward. It is about ensuring that everybody in a classroom situation does have some knowledge of high-incidence, low-complexity additional learning needs. But then they need to be able to have access to specialists who can assist them in their work. All postgraduate courses, run and accredited by our initial teacher-training providers offering qualified teacher status, must meet the current QTS standards that require student teachers to demonstrate that they understand the diverse learning needs of our children and young people.

[77] Obviously, as we develop the new suite of initial teacher-training recommendations for the providers going forward and as we look at the new deal and continuous professional development of our current workforce, and as we look at new professional standards, which we're also looking to bring in, then we must make sure that we have the right skills and are giving our teachers a broader understanding of those needs. But, as I said yesterday, my expectation, arising out of the additional learning needs Bill, is that there will be access to people with expertise in visual impairment and hearing impairment and that that expertise would be available in local authority areas for people to draw on, but we do need to make sure that in our initial teacher-training provision, people have access to understanding the learning needs of a whole cohort of children.

[78] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Llyr.

[79] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Byddaf yn gofyn y cwestiwn yn Gymraeg. Fe gyfeirioch chi ddoe, wrth gwrs, yn eich datganiad, rŷch chi newydd sôn amdano, am yr academi **Llyr Gruffydd:** I will ask the question in Welsh. You referred yesterday in your statement, which you've just mentioned, to the leadership academy that will be created. Does

arweinyddiaeth sydd am gael ei that mean that the days of the chreu. A ydy hynny'n golygu bod qualifications that teachers need to dyddiau'r CPCP, sef y cymhwyster be headteachers are numbered? sydd angen ar athrawon i fod yn benaethiaid, wedi eu rhifo?

[80] **Kirsty Williams:** That will be a matter for the leadership college. It will also be a matter for the Education Workforce Council in Wales. What we want to ensure is that we have continuing professional development and qualifications that equip people to do the job. What I am conscious of, and what I am looking at, is not creating any artificial barriers, but maybe restrict the pool of talent that we can recruit from, especially in terms of school leadership. I am aware of many talented Welsh people, who have initially done their teaching work and their teaching practice across the border in England, but who are extremely fed up with the education system they now find themselves working in and would look to return to Wales to take up the teaching profession and leadership opportunities in Wales and sometimes there are barriers that prevent that from happening easily. So, I will want to be looking, with the education workforce and the leadership academy and with the unions, at how best we can create this suite of qualifications and training opportunities for future leaders, but I do not want to do it in a way that restricts our talent pool. In fact, I want to do it in a way that is expansive and allows those people, who perhaps don't want to do their teaching in another part of the UK—. I want Wales to be the place to be a teacher and that's the kind of system that we want to create here.

[81] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. John, a brief question.

[82] **John Griffiths:** On physical literacy, Cabinet Secretary, I think that one important part of Tanni Grey-Thompson's report was teaching standards and teaching excellence, but I just think, in general, it's a very exciting agenda. I just wonder if you could briefly tell the committee whether that's amongst your priorities driving forward the physical literacy programme.

[83] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, that, of course, will form part of our development of Donaldson, 'Successful Futures' and our new curriculum. One of the outcomes that we will expect of our education is for healthy pupils with great well-being, and physical literacy forms an important part of that. We will also be looking at the areas of learning in experience about how we can give good-quality provision to physical education activities in its broader sense, and we are also refreshing and developing new standards for a very exacting

PE GCSE, actually. It's either this September that will start to be taught, or the following September. So, there'll be a strong emphasis in the new curriculum around making sure our children, when they leave school, are fit, healthy and understand those issues about how they can keep that going for the rest of their lives.

[84] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Moving on, then, our next question is from Michelle Brown.

[85] **Michelle Brown:** I note from your paper that you want to enhance the academic routes and vocational routes into further education and higher education. Do you have any proposals for helping mature students into vocational courses and academic courses, particularly if they're working perhaps on a low income? Because it is quite difficult for them to actually upskill.

[86] **Kirsty Williams:** I think that's a really important point because much of the emphasis, sometimes, in our education system is about young people and getting them skilled up for the workforce of the future, but we actually need to look at the skills levels of the people who we've got currently in the workforce. One of the endemic problems of the Welsh economy—one of the structural weaknesses we have in the Welsh economy—is of a generally lower-skilled workforce than perhaps you would find across the border in England and in Scotland. So, how we can raise those skills is really important. Outside my portfolio, the Government is working on its proposals for the increase in the number of apprenticeships. Those apprenticeships will be all-age because we have recognised that, in the past, the restricting of apprenticeships to those of a younger age group has cut people who are older, who are looking to change their career, looking to upskill. We've cut them out of that particular route. So, we'll be looking to do what we can to open up the apprenticeships.

[87] As we look to future directions around how we plan work-based learning and FE, this all forms part of the governance arrangements with regard to Hazelkorn. We want a much more joined-up approach; at the moment it's very fragmented. As we look potentially to reform the way in which we fund higher education, I would be looking for opportunities there to support part-time students. We already put a lot of money into the Open University via HEFCW for part-time and more flexible study. I will be looking to see what we can do to support part-timers going back into education.

[88] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Anyone else on this? No. Okay. If I can just ask a question in relation to the section in your report on surplus places, and I declare an interest as I've got two schools that are going through closure processes at the moment. You've said in your report about the importance of federation and refer to the school organisation code. I just wondered if you've got any plans to review the school closure process that we now currently have, which is still very relatively new, and whether you've got any plans to actually put some backbone on the cause of federation, which at the moment is left to local authorities.

10:15

[89] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you, Lynne. It is my intention to review the school organisation code. I share your frustration; and you and I have had conversations in the previous Assembly where those frustrations have been very much the same about the status of that code, how local authorities interpret that code and act accordingly. So, we will be looking to review the code, looking to see what we can do to strengthen that. As you will have heard from me yesterday, I believe federation, in different forms, whether that be high school to high school or clusters of primary schools, or even perhaps a high school with feeder primary schools in a particular catchment area, offers us a number of opportunities—one, in driving up standards. We do know, from looking at experience elsewhere that a high-performing school working alongside, in the federation, perhaps a school that is doing less well, can implant their leadership systems and help bring the standards of that other school up. We also know that there are potentially economies of scale, so if worries about finance are driving change, there are economies of scale that can be gained from federation. In some areas, federation means that we can keep children within a community, which is often very much a priority for people, both in urban areas and rural areas, keeping children in their community. But that can be difficult sometimes in terms of recruitment and retention of headteachers, therefore actually being the head and executive head of a federation is a very exciting prospect for a headteacher. It's a big challenge for them to take on, it's the next step in their career perhaps. So, actually, federation offers us benefits in lots and lots and lots of different areas. It's frustrating that, to date, those opportunities haven't been grasped. I'll be looking at interest at how local authorities in both urban and rural parts of Wales are going to take this agenda forward in the coming months and we will be putting a strong emphasis on local authorities that federation provides really exciting opportunities for raising educational standards, maintaining sustainability and, in some areas, actually keeping an

educational resource within a community.

[90] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Darren Millar.

[91] **Darren Millar:** I'm pleased to hear you reiterate some of the comments you made yesterday about federation because I, too, do believe that it is a solution that can be offered to many places in terms of an alternative to closure. One of the other things, Minister, that you referred to yesterday was your support for 'through schools' as an alternative as well, sometimes, to closure and particularly in terms of keeping a local education provision in a community when people are having to travel long distances, perhaps, to secondary schools, in particular, at the moment. Can you just tell us a little bit more about your vision for 'through schools' and the opportunities that they might present to some local authorities? I know there have been some developments in west Wales. There's a through school in Denbighshire that is very successful as well. How do you see those fitting in?

[92] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, again, as I said yesterday, I am looking at a range of governance models to be able to help us in our drive to improve standards and I think in some locations, 'through schools', whether they be 3 to 16 or 3 to 18, is a way in which we can do that. We can keep education within the community but at the same time create a critical mass that actually ensures that we've got the standards right as well, because sometimes that can be a concern. I don't want us to have to make false choices between access and excellence, if you know what I mean, from the old NHS discussions that we've had in the past, Darren. So, 'through schools', I think, are an important mix. I'm hoping to visit the through school in Lampeter shortly. I'm hoping to officially open a through school in September in west Wales. So, there are some really exciting opportunities. It's a relatively new model—relatively—but I think, in some places, that will be the solution to provide a really good education in some parts of Wales. It won't be suitable for everybody but it could well be the solution for driving up standards and maintaining education provision in some parts of Wales.

[93] **Darren Millar:** Thanks.

[94] **Lynne Neagle:** Llyr, on Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

[95] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Diolch yn fawr. **Llyr Gruffydd:** Clearly, you have made Yn amlwg, rŷch chi wedi ei gwneud it clear that you're looking at the yn glir eich bod chi yn edrych ar y possibility of broadening the remit of

posibilrwydd do ehangu *remit* y Coleg Cymraeg i gynnwys addysg bellach. Byddwn i jest yn licio clywed ychydig ynglŷn â'ch gweledigaeth hirdymor chi ar gyfer y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, oherwydd os ydym ni'n edrych ar ddatblygu darpariaeth addysg bellach, er enghraifft, yn amlwg mae angen mwy na dwy neu dair blynedd i ddechrau newid y diwylliant yna o gael pobl yn cymryd cyrsiau drwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg ac yn y blaen. Hynny yw, ble ydych chi'n gweld y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol mewn pump neu 10 mlynedd, efallai? Un bach hawdd i ddechrau. [*Chwerthin.*]

the Coleg Cymraeg to include further education. I just wanted to hear about your long-term vision for the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, because if you're looking at developing further education provision, obviously there needs to be more than two or three years to change that culture of people taking courses through the medium of Welsh. Where do you see the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in five or 10 years? An easy one to begin. [*Laughter.*]

[96] **Kirsty Williams:** Well, firstly, can I say the Welsh Government has been putting in an important level of resource, via HEFCW, to establishing the Coleg? The Coleg is doing some fantastic work in terms of scholarship in the Welsh medium in all sorts of ways—providing resources, supporting, you know, access to provision, lectureships, research—doing really, really, really important work. It's a relatively new concept, new institution, and as that is bedding down and demonstrating an impact, and as we look to respond to Hazelkorn, it seems to me that this is also the right time to look at and to discuss with stakeholders whether we can expand the remit of the Coleg to include FE. Because if we're looking to create a set-up that is more joined up between FE, HE and work-based learning, it seems to me that we need to take the language into consideration when we're doing that. So, I think this is timely and there is a synergy between looking at the implementation of Hazelkorn and looking at the role of the college. We do know, from Estyn reports and from studies, that Welsh-medium provision in FE is not where we would want it to be. It's even more challenging in work-based learning. So, there is scope for improvement, there's the need for improvement, and I think the Coleg is one way in which we can address that.

[97] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Rydych yn Llyr Gruffydd: You accept, therefore, derbyn, felly, mewn egwyddor, er in principle, in order to see the mwyn gweld y newid y mae'r change that the Government wants to Llywodraeth eisiau ei weld o safbwynt see in terms of the provision that's

y ddarpariaeth sydd ar gael a'r available and the numbers that are niferoedd sy'n manteisio ar y taking advantage of that provision, ddarpariaeth honno, fod angen that there is a need for a long-term ymrwymiad hirdymor yn hytrach na commitment rather than going from mynd, efallai, o flwyddyn i flwyddyn year to year or every two or three neu ddwy i dair blynedd ar y tro. years.

[98] **Kirsty Williams:** Yes, I accept that. I appreciate that being able to provide some certainty and that long-term vision and commitment will have to go hand in hand. There's no point expanding the remit of an organisation unless we also give a very clear commitment that that organisation will be there in the long run, as long as it continues to do its job and demonstrate that it's making an impact.

[99] **Lynne Neagle:** Hefin, on this, briefly.

[100] **Hefin David:** I, again, declare an interest. Cardiff Met is a base for Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. Two of the staff were based there and I had long conversations with them about the success. I feel that Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol was one of the success stories of the previous Assembly. So, I'd agree with Llyr about that.

[101] One of the reasons it was successful was because it was able to build very good relationships with schools such as Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni and those feeder schools then fed into higher education. If we're going to build FE, I think we've got to continue to build those close relationships with those schools, but also perhaps English-medium schools where there are students studying Welsh-language qualifications as a second language. There's no reason why they couldn't be offered the same opportunities. So, I think, if it is going to be successful at FE level, the links must go deeper and broader into schools as well.

[102] **Kirsty Williams:** I couldn't agree with you more. One of the reasons why the Coleg has been successful, as you say, is because it has developed those close relationships so that there is a continuum. One of the challenges in providing really good, high-quality, Welsh-medium education is that continuum, so that parents, when they start that journey—and parents don't plan journeys in key stages—when they make that decision about where they're going to send their child to a nursery provision, they're doing so in the context of being able to see that journey. One of the reasons why, potentially, people, especially parents who are not Welsh speaking

themselves, sometimes maybe don't start on that journey is because of a lack of continuum. One of the real challenges we have is being able to have a clear line of sight and therefore those linkages. We're never going to get people going in and studying at HE level or at FE level unless those schoolchildren and their teachers are aware of the opportunities and there is encouragement and there is support and it's not seen as something strange or something unusual, but actually as a natural continuation. We don't think it's strange for somebody to go from the *cy/ch* into the *ysgol Gymraeg*, and then we don't think it's strange that somebody then finishes at 11 and goes on to study Welsh-medium at 11. Why would we suddenly think it was strange for somebody to continue their education at 16 or 18 in Welsh? We need to make it a part of the normal continuum for the students.

[103] **Lynne Neagle:** Really briefly, Llyr.

[104] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Mae cychwyn y siwrnai yna yn digwydd yn y blynyddoedd cynnar. Onid felly yr oedd hi'n gamgymeriad i dorri nôl ar ddarpariaeth Twf, yng ngogledd Cymru yn sicr, oherwydd rŷm ni wedi mynd o ddarpariaeth ym mhob sir nawr i fod â darpariaeth dim ond mewn un canolfan yn y gogledd? Felly, bydd llai o bobl yn cychwyn ar y siwrnai hynny ac onid oedd hynny felly'n benderfyniad anghywir, neu'n gam gwag?

Llyr Gruffydd: The beginning of that journey takes place in the early years. Wasn't it a mistake, therefore, to cut back on the Twf provision, in north Wales certainly, because we have gone from having provision in every county to having provision in only one centre in north Wales? So, there will be fewer people starting on that journey and wasn't that, therefore, the incorrect decision?

[105] **Kirsty Williams:** But, Llyr, there is money going in to promoting the opportunities of Welsh medium at every level. So, for instance, there are information packs and support available, even for midwives. When your baby is born, and you get the red book—you'll know the red book better than anybody; you've got four of them—and you're given that red book by your midwife and your health visitor, there will be information contained within the red book about making a positive choice and the opportunities. So, times are tough, and if we had all the money in the world, maybe some of those decisions would be different decisions. But it is not true to say that we are not taking the opportunity to promote people making a positive choice for pursuing Welsh-medium education for their children at the earliest stage. Even before they're born, parents are being given information about the

opportunities for Welsh-medium education.

[106] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Oscar on the links between education and industry. Brief question, please.

[107] **Mohammad Ashgar:** Thank you very much, Chair. Kirsty, I think you've already touched on industry and education and universities. This EU referendum has made things, maybe in future funding, a bit constrained for our innovation and entrepreneurship in the universities. So, have you any forward plan for those sorts of scenarios that we will face in future?

[108] **Kirsty Williams:** The impact of the referendum, and the decision to leave the European Union, will impact upon education in Wales in many, many ways, and probably in many ways that people are simply not aware of. In particular, you are quite right to say that the impact will be felt greatest in the university sector. Many of the programmes that we run in terms of innovation and the connections between HE and the world of industry, and many of our FE programmes, have traditionally been supported by European funds. Even in our primary schools, the cost of providing free milk for our youngest children has been predominantly paid for by a grant from the European Union. I have an MA in front of me on my desk upstairs, which would have expected a significant amount of money, match funded by the Welsh Government, to train our teachers in coding, and to provide coding workshops for our children. The anticipation was that that would be match funded by the European Union, and I'm having to hold back because I simply do not know whether it's worth starting a programme now, and spending that money now, if we can't have any guarantees. So, the impact is huge, but particularly huge on the HE sector.

[109] I've had early conversations with the University of Wales. I am setting up a standing group to advise me, that will then advise the negotiating team that the First Minister has set up in Brussels, to look at the impact of Brexit on the university sector. We'll be keeping on close working terms with the university sector, and the FE sector, to analyse the impact; to look at the threats; to look at opportunities, if they exist, although I tell you I can't find many of them at the moment; and to be able to negate any risks, because, for some of our universities, they are highly exposed to the European student market. So, for some universities, this is a big, big challenge moving forward.

[110] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay, thank you. Thank you for that, and we will be returning to that issue as a committee. I've just got a very brief question on

Schools Challenge Cymru. A lot of us have seen benefits from that operating in our areas. It's a time-limited programme at the moment; have you got plans to extend it?

[111] **Kirsty Williams:** What I have got plans to do is look at the evaluation. So, as you said, the programme is a time-limited programme. Just like we keep an eye on the impact of PDG, we've asked for independent research to be done to look at the impact of the Schools Challenge programme system. Once that evaluation has been received and looked at, then I'll be making a decision and an announcement on the future of the programme.

[112] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Can I ask if that could maybe be shared with the committee?

[113] **Kirsty Williams:** Oh yes, of course. That's no problem at all.

[114] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. And a final question then on youth work from Llyr.

[115] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Thank you very much, Chair. I'm just wondering what your vision is for youth services in Wales, because I've seen some statistics that suggest that a lot of the money that's being allocated through the revenue support grant and the core youth service budget isn't actually being spent by local authorities on youth services. I think over a quarter, from the figures I've seen, in 2014-15, wasn't spent on youth service. So, I'm just wondering whether that's acceptable. And, there's huge disparity. If you look at each individual local authority, some are spending less than a third of the money that they're receiving for those purposes; others are spending more than 100 per cent.

10:30

[116] So, there is, effectively, a youth service postcode lottery out there in terms of the services that young people can access. So, I'm just wondering how you intend to move the youth service forward and what structure you have in mind in terms of delivering the Wales charter for youth work because the question that I'm being asked by a lot of people out there is: who is driving the youth service today?

[117] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you for that. If I'm honest with you, Llyr, that is not something that I have addressed to date within the portfolio, so I'm

happy to be able to send you a note on it. What we do know is that experiences outside of the classroom are absolutely vital to children in ensuring that they have the broadest opportunity. You will be aware that the previous administration was very keen to look at an extended offer for children in terms of extra-curricular activities, whether that be in traditional youth club—you and I would both have a commitment to the opportunities afforded by the young farmers movement, for instance—whether that be sporting clubs, theatre groups or music classes. We want our children to have the widest possible opportunities. Not all of that can be catered for in the traditional 9 a.m. until 3.30 p.m. school day. So, youth work is an important part of that and I will ask officials to send you a note because I have to admit that, with everything that I've had to get to grips with in the first five or six weeks, that's not something that I've turned my attention to yet. But I'll be looking to work with my Cabinet colleague, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, on what we can do to ensure that there is adequate and good provision. Owen, maybe you've got more to say.

[118] **Mr Evans:** Just a couple words on it: we do monitor things like statistics on those who are not in education, employment or training, pretty hotly, as you can imagine. We've seen some quite good gains over the past few years on the number of people who are leaving schools and who are not in education, employment or training. The youth service is part of that. The work that the youth service has done, the work that Careers Wales have done and the work that colleges have done and the work of a number of services that local authorities provide have contributed to that. We'll be monitoring very closely to see if there's a drop-off in the performance that we've had on reducing the number of NEETs, and the youth service is part of that. We do keep it under consideration.

[119] **Llyr Gruffydd:** My concern is that we don't have a truly national youth service because of this disparity that exists and some young people in some parts of Wales are not being given access to the services that they should have, whereas in other areas, of course, young people can access those services.

[120] **Kirsty Williams:** I take your point and it's an important point and we will look into it for you.

[121] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Okay, that's the last of the questions. Can I thank the Cabinet Secretary for attending this morning, and her officials? I think it's been a really informative session and we look forward to continuing

our dialogue with you in the months ahead. As you know, you will be sent a draft of the transcript for the meeting to check for accuracy after the meeting. But thank you very much for coming. The committee will now break until 10:40.

[122] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you very much.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:33 a 10:42.
The meeting adjourned between 10:33 and 10:42.*

**Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gymunedau a Phlant: Trafod
Blaenoriaethau'r Portffolio
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children—Discussion on
Portfolio Priorities**

[123] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay, we'll reconvene then. Can I welcome Carl Sargeant, the Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children, to our meeting this morning? Thank you for providing a paper in advance. We're looking forward to having a discussion with you about that this morning. Could I ask you to just introduce your officials for the record and then to make some opening remarks, please?

[124] **The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Children (Carl Sargeant):** Of course. Good morning, Chair. Good morning, committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be with you this morning. Jo-Anne, could you start?

[125] **Ms Daniels:** I'm Jo-Anne Daniels, I'm the director with responsibility for communities and tackling poverty.

[126] **Carl Sargeant:** Albert.

[127] **Mr Heaney:** Good morning, I'm Albert Heaney, the director for social services and integration.

[128] **Carl Sargeant:** Chair, thank you for the opportunity to come to committee and early on in the session, actually. I am very grateful, actually. I'm really excited about this new portfolio and the opportunities we have in working with you over the coming months and years, hopefully.

[129] I issued a briefing paper for committee, but I wanted to come today

just to tell you about the themes of my department. It's quite a wide-ranging department, as most of the Cabinet Secretary positions are now. The children and young people brief covers from housing to community safety to children. I think it's a really great synergy that we can start to build across the unit. I've tasked my department with looking at some common themes about what's our objective in terms of delivering for Government and for communities across Wales.

[130] The two areas I've asked them to focus on are economic regeneration, being one of the key themes, and the other area is about well-being, and particularly issues around tackling adverse childhood experiences. I believe that those two areas are something where we can have a direct impact on communities and individuals' lives, which will have a huge difference long term. I think the WFG Act that we introduced in Government last year is a good example of planning for the long term and the preventative approach, and I think Government departments should act upon it, and that's what's key to my unit.

[131] The overall goal for me is making sure that, for young people in Wales, all children have the best possible start in life. That's a real challenge for us all—to make sure that we give opportunities—which I hope we share in terms of the non-partisan approach to looking after young people.

10:45

[132] On specific priorities of that, I want to promote children's well-being; I want to promote their physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural opportunities and their welfare, and to foster the economic renewal and regeneration and growth opportunities, which I said in my opening remarks. The Government's child poverty strategy is something that we are seeking to refresh in line with the overall poverty strategy. We have to think about our levers in Wales and what we have and the levers that we don't, and the issues around Europe or whether that be UK Government interventions—the things that we can't and don't have control of. What are our mitigating circumstances and the things that we are able to achieve? So, I'm looking very closely, with the challenges that face us, about how we can make the best of the financial settlement we have in order to do that.

[133] Of course, the work is encompassed by the legislation around the WFG Act and we will continue to do that. I think it sets us on an international footing about opportunity. We are well placed across the globe in doing

something very different, building sustainable development in the heart of decision making. I will be pushing that through my department very hard, but also our partners. I've already met with many stakeholders, externally, saying, 'If you want to do business with us, then, you have to use the same principles and adopt the same principles of planning for the long term too'.

[134] In terms of areas I'm sure you'll be very interested in, there are our manifesto commitments around a better deal on childcare, Flying Start, Families First, looked-after children—I know we had a debate in the Chamber only last week, which was very positive and supported by many of the parties that have the same principled approach that we seek to take—children's rights and participation and the issues around bringing forward legislation to remove the defence of reasonable chastisement, which is another area of important work that my department will be taking forward this year.

[135] I've got many more things to say, Chair; I'm sure I could keep talking for this session, but I'm sure you may have some questions as well, and that you might want to delve deeper into some of my initial thoughts.

[136] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Thank you very much for those introductory remarks. We'll take questions now from Members. I've got Julie Morgan first on childcare.

[137] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Cabinet Secretary, for your introduction. Obviously, the pledge on childcare—the delivery of 30 hours a week, 48 weeks of the year—is a very ambitious pledge and really very positive, I think, for parents, and I know it's supported by a number of parties. I wondered if you could tell us how you're going to set about doing the preparatory work for introducing something that I think is probably quite a complicated area.

[138] **Carl Sargeant:** Thank you, Julie, for your question. I think it would be fair to say that the majority of political parties had some childcare pledge in their manifestos leading up to the election. The civil service were very nimble, actually, because they were already starting to think about opportunities and intervention and how delivery could take place in regard to any particular party winning that proposal. It was always going to be a challenge. Notwithstanding the proposals that we've put through our manifesto—30 hours a week for 48 weeks for working parents of three and four-year-olds is a huge challenge, but a huge opportunity for that economic stimulus, but also the quality childcare that we seek to deliver over the

coming years.

[139] In terms of pathway, I think we are starting to learn from the work that was started by the civil service prior to the election in May. I've picked up that piece of work now and started to look at how we are talking to the sector. We've had initial discussions with those and I'm very keen that we actually talk to parents. I think that's the key element here for moving from the 10 or 12 hours of foundation phase up to the 30 hours. It's going to be an important part of linking that process so that it's a smooth process; a smooth transition into what that looks like. So, we're starting some focus groups with parents as well. We're going to be starting a social media programme on—I can't remember the name, Jo-Anne, but—

[140] **Ms Daniels:** Talk Childcare.

[141] **Carl Sargeant:** Talk Childcare, which is very apt. We're going to kick that off very shortly. We're just trying to get the Mumsnet side and fathers' interest in how this is going to operate. I'm hoping, in practical terms, that we can start some pathfinder programmes towards the end of next year—2017—then we'll start to roll that out. The problem with this is capacity. The sector has to grow, and they're very keen to grow with us, but it's not a light-bulb moment; we have to build this in. We're learning an awful lot, actually, because there was a difficult report from the Public Accounts Committee in England around Westminster when they tried to introduce this programme. Helpfully, it's given us some of the pitfalls that we hopefully won't fall into. So, we're learning a lot. It's a very complex programme. How we get to that space is something that I'd like to keep the committee and the Chamber updated on, but our intent and timeline is to start rolling out the programme towards the end of next year.

[142] **Julie Morgan:** One of the key things that parents tell me is that they're looking for flexibility to suit their complicated arrangements. Is that something that you're bearing in mind?

[143] **Carl Sargeant:** It is, and this is just one of the complex issues that—. We're trying to get away from the very personal interventions of the here and now, because people will tell me, 'I start work at 7 o'clock in the morning, I need childcare then', but actually, we've got to look at a much broader way of how this may or may not operate. So, whether that's a mixture between public and private sector deliverers, how that may work with vouchers or not, what will be the process for securing childcare, how will we measure that,

who will be eligible for it—we know who should be eligible, but how are we going to do that? So, these are processes that we're working through now. It is extremely complex and the team are working very hard to do that, but I am confident we can, and the sector is, as I said, very keen to engage. But for me, part of the WFG Act, as well, is making sure that we have social interaction about the people that this matters to. So, parents who have experienced this or are due to experience this: what's their real life experience? Because governments can make programmes, but it doesn't always fit the person. So we're hoping to get a people-focused delivery session on this, and as I've said, we've already started some focus groups, one in Welsh Government, one in a large private-sector company, with parents who are in the childcare movement already. It's really important for me to listen to parents on this.

[144] **Lynne Neagle:** Oscar.

[145] **Mohammad Asghar:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Carl, Cabinet Secretary, for this on childcare—it is a very important part of the whole affair. My point is that you have already pledged—I think you have said that work is under way, and that pledges are going to be mentioned in detail shortly. The fact is that the Scandinavians are miles ahead of us. You said it's a very difficult area, but what about Scotland and even Northern Ireland, and your counterparts? Have you had some sort of understanding? It's very complicated, yes, but certain countries have gone much further than us, so your knowledge and information and all of those areas—have you covered that with them to make sure that we compete with them, or go ahead of them?

[146] **Carl Sargeant:** Yes, my team have been working, as I said earlier, prior to the election, and have engaged with other countries, but also other areas in the UK. This is by far the largest childcare pledge anywhere in the UK, when this will happen, and we are learning from other people's mistakes. Fortunately for us, there are people that have led the path on this, and as I said, there was a PAC report about a month back that highlighted some of the issues, particularly in—I think it was Yorkshire—where they piloted some of these schemes already. One of the issues was the rate of childcare, so, the value for this, because some providers use government schemes for elements of the day but top up with the parents, with additionality. The problem with this scheme is that the government scheme would be most of the day, so they couldn't top up with additionality from parents. So, the value of the unit was very important to them, and making sure that they could

make it sustainable, and that's something that we want to make sure we've got our eyes fully open for when we enter into these negotiations. That's why the sectoral approach and the parent approach is going to be really important. But we are learning from other countries, and yes, of course, some of the Scandinavian countries have had very different models of childcare and education systems in the past, but we are learning from that, too. I would say that there are things that we are doing in this country where other countries look upon us as good practice, too. I'm not embarrassed by any means, or shy, to learn from other experiences.

[147] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Llyr then Darren.

[148] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Thank you, Chair. You've mentioned the word 'quality' in relation to childcare, and you and the First Minister previously have said that you want to provide quality childcare with equitable access across all parts of Wales. I'm just wondering whether you could define what your understanding of 'quality' is in this context.

[149] **Carl Sargeant:** It's a really difficult question, and I don't think I can fully answer it, if I'm being honest with you, but what I think I mean by that is—the simple way to do this was provide some vouchers to parents and say, 'Go and find some childcare,' and that would suffice, technically, on that. I've been very keen to say to my team that isn't acceptable to me, nor to the First Minister, and what we're looking for is the childcare plus scenario. I think foundation phase has been a remarkable success, in many cases, for our young people in Wales. What I'd like to do is to ensure that the experience of young people isn't a place where we just park them for some time for the economic benefit of the parent. I want to make sure that the living experience for the child is something through which we can help them grow and succeed in life too. So, I don't know—I can't define what the quality aspect is, but I think it's more than the normal of parking a child somewhere safe. It's got to be more than that.

[150] I'm working also with the children's commissioner and the well-being of future generations commissioner to look at a deep dive into childcare and into early years to see what that means—the synergies between programmes are going to be really important too. So, where do we add value in areas, what can we learn from that best practice and how can we support young people in this proposal? So, I'm sorry I can't be definitive in that answer, but I hope that you get a feeling of what I want and what I'm seeking to do.

[151] **Llyr Gruffydd:** Because another aspect—and there's a lot of international evidence that shows that it's the quality of the workforce as well that can have a key, key bearing on the outcomes that young people have from childcare—is that the evidence points to the value of having graduate-level practitioners working with children. So, I'm just wondering how you're going to ensure that we have that quality level of provision accessible across Wales.

[152] **Carl Sargeant:** What I've already started talking about with the skills Minister, and you'll note that, in the First Minister's session yesterday in the Chamber, where he was unable at that point to issue a statement on the programme for government because of the financial aspects we find ourselves in following the Brexit campaign—. A lot of the training programmes that we have across Wales are based on European support, and that's something that the sector and we are concerned about, because making sure we've got the capacity with the sector to take this forward—. I agree with the Member that the quality of the childcare is based around the quality of the service provided. While we have safe, good childcare facilities across Wales that have been inspected, I think we can add value to all of that by the quality of the people in those settings. We have to try to professionalise this whole process. It's something that the skills Minister is very keen to work on as well.

[153] So, as I said earlier, this isn't just about a childcare pledge; we can think of the huge opportunities that this will bring in terms of employment and community regeneration opportunities. There are so many attachments to just this single pledge that, potentially, will have great success across all of Wales, and it's something I know the Member would share.

[154] **Llyr Gruffydd:** I agree with the comment about professionalising, or, at least, that upgrading skills within the workforce is key in that respect. So, with that in mind, can you maybe update us on timescales for publication of the 10-year early years and childcare workforce plan and commitments to improve quality standards in the workforce? Where are we with that?

[155] **Carl Sargeant:** We are developing the 10-year plan. I can't give you the date of issue. The progress of the success is being developed to support the ambition of the 10-year programme. Financial support provided will enable the existing workforce to upskill from levels 2 to 6, so we are in that process. Perhaps I can write to the committee with a note on the detail of that. I'm not sighted on that.

[156] **Lynne Neagle:** Darren.

[157] **Darren Millar:** Yes, I just wanted to ask, in terms of the childcare pledge, what consideration you have given to the use of extended families to provide that childcare—grandparents or other trusted people around the families who might want to take advantage of this increased childcare pledge. A lot of people would appreciate some income for the informal childcare that they already bring to the table, and I'm just wondering to what extent you've thought about that as a Government.

[158] **Carl Sargeant:** We haven't thought about those being providers, but what we have thought about is actually their skill and judgment, because lots of trusted family members—generally, grandparents who look after children—have got a great knowledge about their young people and what the timescale, et cetera, is. So, the focus groups are not including just parents, but people who know about this and have real-life experience. So, we are seeking the views of trusted grandparents in shaping our policy agenda.

11:00

[159] I haven't given any thought about specifically funding smaller units, because of the capacity issue on this. We are looking at a very big programme here, but I'm not saying that we shouldn't look at that, and I will give it some thought. We're developing this programme from scratch, and I'm not writing anything off yet, but what I do need to be very clear about is that I need to get this programme running as soon as possible, because, while lots of people are very positive about it, it will only be positive if we deliver it. That's why, by the end of next year, I've tasked my team—or earlier—. I want to see this starting to roll out next year.

[160] **Darren Millar:** I suspect this is one way, potentially, to rapidly expand capacity, and probably at a lesser cost, if trusted family members were able to be paid for bringing some childcare to other family members. Of course, if you asked most parents, a lot of them would rather leave their child with a grandparent or another trusted family member than at some nursery down the road.

[161] **Carl Sargeant:** Of course. I'll be very careful how I say this, but I think what Llyr's point was, and I share it, was about the quality of childcare and what that looks like. I'm not suggesting for a moment that being with

grandparents isn't a good experience for the child, but the educational value, sometimes, could be enhanced by a different setting. So, cautiously I'm saying that, but I'm not saying I'm writing it off either. I think we've got to consider all options here. I'm very keen that I have a project that can deliver our manifesto commitment, which is a very challenging one, but I'm confident that we can do that.

[162] **Lynne Neagle:** John, on this, then.

[163] **John Griffiths:** I was going to move on to Flying Start, actually, Chair.

[164] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay, that's fine. We can go on to Flying Start, then.

[165] **John Griffiths:** Okay. I take your point about the well-being of future generations Act, and it's important for the preventative agenda and the long-term view, and I think there's a lot of evidence that the first 1,000 days of a human life are extremely important for life chances and future development. So, I wonder if you could say a little bit about Flying Start and the expansion of Flying Start, and whether we're on track in terms of increasing the numbers benefiting from the scheme.

[166] **Carl Sargeant:** I don't suppose the committee heard, as you've been sitting this morning, but the Flying Start statistics were out this morning, at 9.25 a.m., I think, and I'm pleased that I can come to committee and tell you the stats. We doubled the programme, as we said we would, prior to the end date in 2016, and we've increased that as well. So, we're up to 38,000 activity interventions with Flying Start. It's an incredible programme, and they work extremely hard in communities, making sure that there is positive intervention with families and children. It's something I'm very keen to pursue for the future, too.

[167] I think, in terms of where that sits now, and this goes back to my initial point about what the department stands for, we have Flying Start, Families First, Communities First, the childcare pledge, early years; how do we make sure that these all fit and integrate with each other? I've started making sure that we can operate horizontally better, but also with a common objective of well-being and regeneration.

[168] The 1,000-day programme is something I am absolutely committed to, to make sure that we have early years at the centre of intervention for this department's Government policy, because if we get the early years right, and

the prevention agenda right, it's something that we will reap benefits from in the longer term. It's not just morally right, but it's actually financially the right thing to do, because public bodies, longer term, will not have to make longer term interventions. So, the 1,000 days, the issue around ACEs, which I touched on earlier on—the adverse childhood experiences—I would urge the committee to look at that very carefully, because I think there is something in that that actually will change the way that structures of communities will operate. We can actually do something about these things. So, I'm linking in what Flying Start does and the other intervention programmes, and I will be making a statement probably in the autumn about what the future of these programmes looks like, how they will interlink with each other better and how we can have a long-term vision for children from pre-birth to when they leave into the adult system, so that it is as flexible and supportive as possible.

[169] **John Griffiths:** Could I just ask about early language acquisition because, again, that's very important for life chances and general education experience and attainment? In terms of the linkages, Flying Start is important—we've got language and play—but obviously other Ministers have important responsibilities as well. We know that, at age five, children in persistent poverty are twice as likely to score below average for language acquisition as their better-off peers. And there's a strong campaign that talks about the quality of the early years workforce, which you've already touched on—support for parents and leadership—as being crucial to addressing these issues, particularly for the more deprived children. So, I wonder if you could just say a little bit about those linkages that you mentioned in terms of tackling these problems.

[170] **Carl Sargeant:** Again, I know he is a champion for this, and it's something that I've started. It's a really interesting discussion we're having on the fifth floor now with the leads in the departments of Alun Davies or Kirsty Williams, who have already started discussing issues beyond education. I talked about the very tragic case yesterday of the young boy who lost his life. Actually, our approach needs to be more holistic and family-centred—what that means for the growth of the young person, so not just about the parent or just the young person, but also what's the family unit and how do we support those? That's why the Families First and Flying Start programmes have really deep intervention processes. I think, while there is an ethos of family support there, sometimes it's about confidence and opportunity, and then we have to build in the security of the educational value to the family and to the young person as well. It's something I've

started to discuss with Kirsty Williams and with Alun Davies in terms of how we get in that early identification and then action around that. So, the language element of this is something that I am aware of, and certainly my colleagues are too, and we'll be looking at that very closely.

[171] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. We'll move on now then to looked-after children. Michelle Brown.

[172] **Michelle Brown:** Thank you, Chair. I just had a very quick question, actually—I'm sure you'll be quite pleased. I just wondered what measures you're thinking about putting into place to provide support for looked-after children after they actually leave care. What proposals have you considered so far to try and up their educational attainment while they're in care? Because, I mean, obviously, children in care are lacking a very, very key thing, which is parental interest, and they're lost in so many other ways.

[173] **Carl Sargeant:** I'm quite a robust person, but some of these things really worry me and they dearly touch my heart strings in terms of what we are doing here with young people and how we are able to support them in the longer term. Looked-after children is one of those areas. I am quite pleased that the attainment rate has—. Well, the attainment rate for looked-after children is low, but it's increasing consistently with the attainment rate of people not in care. So, it is on the way up but there's still a gap and that's not acceptable. So, what do we do to do that? I met with the skills Minister on Monday to talk about how we support young people in that setting at an earlier age. There's a programme operating—I think it's operating in Cardiff, actually, at the moment on a trial basis—where we are looking to support people with additional needs at the age of 40 [correction: 4], actually; getting in very early to say, 'Look, sometimes we leave the system, it's not perhaps the right system to be in, but actually we shouldn't leave you; what more can we do to support you, particularly on education?' The five GCSE measure for looked-after children is very low. I'm not yet convinced myself that we should be measuring children just on their attainment of five GCSEs. Actually, these young people have got some very deep-rooted issues other than five GCSEs, and I think this is where I go back to the issue around how we protect these individuals at an early age. We're sort of on the treadmill of people in the system. What we've got to do is try to prevent people getting into the system as well. And that's why the focus on tackling issues around domestic violence, alcohol abuse, substance misuse, family break-ups, parenting support—all of these things are part of our community make-up. These ACEs that people experience; if you stack ACEs up—. I'll give you one example. I'll

stop going on about it in a minute, Chair, but, if a young person experiences five or more ACEs, so has seen some drug or alcohol misuse, some arrests within the family, a family break-up, et cetera—if you stack five ACEs up through their lifetime—they are 20 times more likely to be incarcerated and 16 times more likely to be assaulted in life. If we can start reducing the number of ACEs—and we can—we can change communities; we can change people's opportunities. And I think the public health document that Public Health Wales did—they've done this on ACE actions, and also ACE in mental health, and the statistics around them are significant. And, I think, as a department, my focus has got to be on something like that.

[174] So, I think, Michelle, your question around what we do specifically for looked-after children, we're on the treadmill and we're trying to help and support that cohort, and Albert and his team are working with the skills Minister currently to try and enable them for a longer-term support in life. But we have to get in much earlier in our young people's lives to say, 'Things are going wrong here; how can we protect them from getting in the system in the first place?'

[175] **Michelle Brown:** Thank you.

[176] **Lynne Neagle:** I've got a question on looked-after children as well. This sits in your portfolio, but a lot of the legislation is in the Minister for Social Services' portfolio, including the new Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. And one of the concerns that's been raised regularly, as good as the Act is, is that, obviously, it's more focused on adults. It's removed some of the child-centred legislation, and I just wondered how you are going to ensure that there is an effective partnership, really, and also how we are going to retain the focus on children with the legislation sitting in a different portfolio.

[177] **Carl Sargeant:** Can I start by saying, first of all, Albert works between myself and the health and social services Minister too? So, we've got consistency in terms of staffing and regulation and policy, and his team works very closely with us. Can I also give you confidence, in terms of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, that, in terms of well-being, it does cover children as well, and it's something that I'm very keen to ensure we don't lose sight of, or that people are under any illusion that it doesn't? Yesterday's discussion highlighted the fact that I'm very keen to do that. I'm writing now to safeguarding boards across Wales around these issues particularly.

[178] What Rebecca Evans and myself have already discussed is about making sure that there aren't any gaps in the system, who looks after who and where, and there is a fall-back position that I will take responsibility around safeguarding in general. Rebecca obviously deals with adults, but, if there is any doubt in the procedure, it will be my responsibility, and that's where we—. So there's no significant demarcation—any doubt, then it will fall within my department. I don't know whether Albert can add any value to the question that the Chair offered.

[179] **Mr Heaney:** Thank you, Minister. The Act actually is about children and adults—so, again, that reassurance. Part 6 of the Act around looked-after children really strengthens our responsibilities, and the codes have brought together some of the critical learning that we have had around children's experiences, both in the care system, but also when they leave the care system. And the emphasis is to strengthen and improve. So, if we look at the care leaver experience, in Part 6, in the codes, it is strengthening the relationship between housing, children's services, and other partners to ensure that there's stability, so that young people, when they leave the care system, then they have education, they have employment, but they have secure housing. So, it's actually been addressing some of the thorny issues, such as bed and breakfast use as accommodation, and those have been directly tackled.

[180] The Minister has set up under the legislation an improving outcomes for looked-after children group. Phase 1 of that work has been completed. Indeed, in terms of partnership, the vice chair of that group was a young person, Dan Pitt, who did an excellent job through that—so, again, at the heart of leading and developing leaders of the future. But, directly, the work that is now taking place from that is that the Minister has agreed to go into a phase 2 and, in phase 2, we will be looking directly at the early interventions and at the prevention to ensure that children and young people get the services that they need.

11:15

[181] In relation to education, Welsh Government has, at the beginning of this year, of course, launched its new strategy in relation to aspirations or ambitions— lifting our ambition and looking at how we improve the educational attainment of looked-after children. And, indeed, emerging reports—there's the Estyn report just recently this month, which has been

published in relation to good practice around looked-after children, and what that shows is that in some places across Wales, we've got some really good practice taking place. And what our job is is to make sure now that we have that good practice everywhere throughout Wales and that we close the gap between the attainment level of looked-after children and of all children in Wales.

[182] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay, thank you. On this, Julie.

[183] **Julie Morgan:** Yes, very quickly, Albert mentioned the vice-chair, who was a young person, of this group, but what plans do you have to directly engage with care leavers and young people in care to get the direct feedback?

[184] **Carl Sargeant:** Indeed, and Albert mentioned the issue of the second phase of the group and I'm looking at the refresh of that programme to make sure—. It really is important to me, and I've had some robust discussions with my team about how our engagement processes operate within the Government and civil service. I am absolutely focused on real-life experiences—I want to understand. And whether that's domestic violence or homelessness or indeed looked-after children, we must get the real-life experience, because expert advice is valued, but, actually, real-life experience is incredibly important too. That's why the WFG Act says about how do we ensure we have—. For me to comply as a Minister, and for us to comply as Government, we must have engagement. I'm very keen to ensure that the young person's voice is part of that feed-in in that section. It's not just about paying lip service to that, but about actually doing something with that information as well. So, all my policies will be people-centred and, particularly, because this department is for children, there will be a lot of children's voices heard. I suppose that leads on to some of the other activities around the Funky Dragon campaign, et cetera, that are out there and other children's community groups; the voices of those young people are really important to me. I hope that the Member will realise that I'm not just saying that; it actually is, and I think that we can inform better Government policy if we actually listen to people.

[185] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay, thank you. Okay. We'll move on now, then, to welfare reform. Hefin David.

[186] **Hefin David:** In your submission to the committee—the statement about mitigating the effects of welfare reform—it seems fairly clear that tax

and benefit reforms are going to have a consequence on child poverty, and will increase child poverty in your view. A number of providers have emerged, such as the Trussell Trust, which is providing foodbanks but also now moving into more than food programmes. How do you intend to work with the third sector and these kind of providers to mitigate the effects of benefit reforms?

[187] **Carl Sargeant:** Within the department, I also look after the voluntary sector too; the list is endless, it appears. I've met with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action on these issues and these are historic. Leighton Andrews led on it previously in terms of the relationship between our partners' advice services, which are critical, and our support mechanisms. But, look, I'll be perfectly honest with you: what I don't have is finance. I cannot mitigate some of the actions that are levers from other Governments. Respectfully, Governments make decisions, but they have consequences too. Unfortunately, we're on the wrong side of that because these things are happening, they're being done, and that is the democratic choice of people. The Governments make those decisions. I may not like them, but that's how it is. What I can do is look at the programme of interventions that we do have and that's why I said early on that I've got to review the whole of my department about what do they do—where are we touching people on the ground?

[188] That's why Communities First, Families First, Flying Start are all important parts of my division, which actually are in the front end of some of our more troubled, deprived, at-risk communities. So, I'm looking at how do they operate, what can they do; some of our voluntary sector programmes that we support, some of the ones that we don't—what's our relationship with those—and trying to get a more joined-up programme, because we can't afford repetition, duplication. We have to have a single point where people who do these interventions well, we can support them if we can, and, if we can't support them financially, how can we help them on their journey? People like the Trussell Trust and many others—Citizens Advice, et cetera—are at the front end of this. We couldn't do our job of community resilience without them.

[189] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. We move on now then to legislation related to the removal of the defence of reasonable chastisement. Julie.

[190] **Julie Morgan:** Thank you, Chair. I wondered if you could tell us the timetable for this proposal and how you are preparing for it.

[191] **Carl Sargeant:** Well, the First Minister will obviously make some further decisions on that, but we are seeking to introduce that into the second year of the programme. That's our current intention. Again, this is another very challenging piece of legislation that we're seeking to introduce but it's something that I am very keen to ensure we have all views expressed. We will be legislating on this; that is my intention. As I said, I will be bringing more to the Chamber and to committee. I think, to offer to the Member—I know, an avid campaigner on this very issue—what I want to set out for the people of Wales is a package, a suite, of tools around parenting. I think it would be unfortunate for us just to come to the table to say, 'You cannot do this', without providing additional support elsewhere. So, I'm looking at the parenting and family support mechanisms we have in place to enhance the experience of children growing up and I will legislate on the side of that too. So, I'm looking at how we develop that programme as we move forward but will look forward to, actually, the committee's intervention with this too, about what experiences you can bring to the floor, so that I can create the right policy for the people of Wales.

[192] **Julie Morgan:** So, are you starting the work with the parenting now?

[193] **Carl Sargeant:** Obviously, we've got the childcare pledge, so my department is quite challenged in terms of what we are trying to achieve, but we are already starting again looking at—. So, I've tasked the team with looking at parent intervention programmes—not just within my department; health and social services have those too, and education. What is it that they do? What is it we do? Who's got the best practice? What do people see on the ground—so, health and social workers? How do we manage the support mechanisms we currently have and how can we take them into the future to have a better solution? What we don't want to do—and it's certainly not the intention of this Government, and I know it's not of the Member either—is to criminalise parents in any way. What we're trying to do is to give people a better growing environment and that's what, certainly, I'm seeking to do. Again, discussions with charities will start very shortly—and lobby organisations, children's representation groups. There's been an awful lot of work already done on this, so we're not starting from standstill, but what I do want to be assured of, as Minister responsible for this, is that we've got the support mechanisms in place for parents that can enhance their experience of growing up with young people. It can be a hugely challenging time for some people but, you know, we've got to be able to step into that space and support individuals too.

[194] **Lynne Neagle:** Thank you. Darren.

[195] **Darren Millar:** Yes, I just wanted to ask you about this, Minister, because, of course, you say you don't want to criminalise parents yet that's precisely what this law may actually end up doing unless those other tools are available. I can't understand why you as a Minister, or as a Cabinet Secretary now, would want to rush into legislating on this when you haven't made all of these other tools available across the whole of Wales in terms of supporting people to make other positive parenting choices that don't involve reasonable chastisement of their children. You also accept that other forms of discipline can be equally if not more abusive to children, potentially, when they are misused or used in the wrong way. What are you going to do to deal with those issues also? Why is there such a focus on smacking?

[196] **Carl Sargeant:** I know the Member has an equally strong view as other Members in this committee in the opposite direction in terms of this and I acknowledge that. That isn't where I sit and we'll have to agree to disagree on some of those terms the Member uses. Can I just say that I don't agree with the Member that we don't have parenting plans across Wales? I think there is some consistency and we can enhance that in terms of the ability to share with parents a better programme. As I said, there are intervention programmes already in place where there are parents struggling to be good parents—

[197] **Darren Millar:** But they're not equally accessible, are they?

[198] **Carl Sargeant:** If you let me finish, as I was kind enough to do for you, the issue for me is making sure that we can have some consistency around support for parents in the longer term, which will also come with legislation on the back of that, where I will be legislating for this programme. The First Minister has been very clear on that. I want to do that with the sector and with parents to give them confidence that this isn't about criminalisation. And quite frankly, Darren, if parents go beyond the pale—what I would consider abuse in the smacking process—quite frankly, there should be some criminal activity around that. I'm not saying that parents who are challenged at a certain time in life who end up feeling that the only process is smacking—then, we need to educate and support those parents. If it becomes the norm to do this all the time and physically abuse your child in that way, then I think there is a problem and we need to intervene there. So, we'll have to agree to disagree on the process, but I'm sure we will have lots

of opportunities to discuss the policy as that develops over the next couple of months.

[199] **Darren Millar:** Can I just come back on that? You and I both agree that we need to promote other tools of discipline. I have no issue with you there at all, Minister. My question is—lots of parents across Wales use smacking as a reasonable form of discipline. They use it sparingly in the confines of their loving relationship with their child as a tool of discipline. There are other tools that are available. Some of those parents will not be familiar with those tools and will not have had them used in their own upbringing. Clearly, there needs to be access to positive parenting for everybody. There isn't that equity of access at the moment. Why are you rushing to legislate before that equity of access is there?

[200] **Lynne Neagle:** We need a brief answer.

[201] **Carl Sargeant:** I'll be very quick. There is equity of access.

[202] **Darren Millar:** There isn't.

[203] **Carl Sargeant:** We have a public awareness campaign for parenting, 'Give it time', which is accessible to everybody should they so wish. What we've got to do as a Government and units across Wales is be more proactive in pushing the positive parenting agenda. We just disagree. I think the process around smacking is something we're not going to agree on. But I will be legislating in this term.

[204] **Michelle Brown:** Just a small question. What is the sanction going to be for parents who smack their children? What are you going to do with them?

[205] **Carl Sargeant:** We'll have to devise the legislation to be proportionate in terms of what that will mean. But as I said earlier on, where parents become what would be considered to be abusive, and have an abusive relationship with a young person in their family, then there would be, ultimately, a criminal sanction. But this is not a process of seeking to criminalise parents. This is a process of supporting parents. Ultimately, there are already sanctions in place, and Darren raised this earlier on, for—other than smacking—abusive relationships with young people. There are intervention powers already in terms of that. This is—

[206] **Darren Millar:** [*Inaudible.*]

[207] **Lynne Neagle:** Darren, don't interrupt.

[208] **Carl Sargeant:** This is very specific in terms of smacking and that's something that we are very keen to make sure that we—. This was part of our manifesto commitment. People made a choice, in terms of the electorate, and it's something that we will be committing to legislating on in this term of Government.

[209] **Lynne Neagle:** We're going to move on from this now, because this is a big issue that we will be spending time on in the future. You mentioned in your earlier remarks about Funky Dragon and the whole issue of a youth parliament. I'm sure we've all been lobbied on that issue. Are you able to provide any update on Government thinking in that area?

[210] **Carl Sargeant:** I think I alluded to the fact that I am very keen to engage with young people in the groups and making sure that our policy objectives are influenced by young people and will continue to do that. In terms of—and the First Minister has, I think, made this publicly clear as well—of the youth parliament, I don't think that's a matter for the Government. I think that is a matter for the Assembly and a matter for the Commission, I would suggest. I think the First Minister has, if he hasn't written to the Presiding Officer in that respect—. We are not opposed to that at all. I think, actually, it is a really good idea, but it's not our idea. I think it's a matter for the Assembly to decide whether there should be a youth parliament, and it's something the committee may have a view on. That's the Government position on that.

[211] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Thank you. We'll move on now, then, to the general area of children's rights. Darren.

[212] **Darren Millar:** Minister, one of the passions that I know you and I both share is the children's rights agenda. We were very proud to be Members of the Assembly at the time when the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, and the recognition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, were enshrined in Welsh law. Can you tell me whether you have any plans to look at, perhaps, the role of the children's commissioner for Wales and the powers of the children's commissioner, to ensure that those rights are always upheld, and also whether there are plans to extend the due-regard principle to local authorities, health boards and other parts of the public sector in a way that they are not currently there at

the moment?

[213] **Carl Sargeant:** Early days—I haven't given that much thought in that process, in terms of extending the powers. But I have met the children's commissioner on several occasions—at the Eisteddfod and in a recent meeting in my office too. She is a very robust commissioner, if I may say, which I am pleased about, because I think that the principle of the independence of the commissioner is an important one to challenge Government and public bodies. It is something that I think was enhanced by the WFG Act, in terms of the children's element of that, and ensuring that the engagement process is embedded in the decision making for 44 public bodies. But I am aware that the commissioners have met collectively—so, all of the commissioners—I don't know what you would call a collective, but I've got a view—

[214] **Darren Millar:** A cluck of commissioners. [*Laughter.*]

[215] **Carl Sargeant:** I perhaps won't share that with the committee. But the commissioners have met collectively to see how their pincer movements on public bodies and Government could be enhanced about challenging—and quite rightly so. I mean, we've put these people in place to be critical friends, and I think the children's commissioner has been very effective at that. We saw a report on the UNCRC—a UK Government report on it—the other week, and we're formulating a response to that. Going back to the ethos of what I want to do, it is to embed and enshrine what the rights are. But actually, we should go beyond that. Young people are part of our life. They are our future generations, and we should listen to them much more carefully.

[216] Part of our problem in society is that we tell young people what they have to do, as opposed to asking them what we should be doing. So, I am trying to rejuvenate our department about thinking about what we do with Government policy.

[217] **Darren Millar:** Just in terms of the commissioner specifically, and her role, obviously there was discussion in the previous Assembly, and I think the Welsh Government indicated it wanted to take something forward, on having greater consistency around the framework by which the appointments and the terms of the commissioners are set, and the powers available to commissioners as well. Are you saying that that is still something that the Government is committed to, or is the Government actively considering it?

[218] **Carl Sargeant:** It is a matter for the First Minister, in terms of the process of the commissioner. I recall that there was a report done about the commissioners and appointments, et cetera. I think it would be reasonable to say that there should be some consistency considered around these processes, but it is a matter for the First Minister, not for me.

[219] **Lynne Neagle:** Julie.

[220] **Julie Morgan:** It's very interesting that the three commissioners are all women. You are talking about consistency. What I wanted to ask was—

[221] **Carl Sargeant:** And the Prime Minister later.

[222] **Julie Morgan:** Oh yes, later on. Yes. We have mentioned the Measure and how it should be embodied in the work of the Government. I just wondered whether you've been able yet to make any assessment about whether everything we do here in terms of policy and in terms of the laws we make, that children are right at the centre of that. Has there been any assessment of that, or have you made any assessment since you came into post?

[223] **Carl Sargeant:** I haven't made an assessment. Of course, my answer, as a Government Minister, will be, 'Well, of course there is'. Am I convinced of that? Probably not, if I'm honest. I think what we've got to make sure—. Having a new ministry is an exciting process but quite scary too. I fortunately had this portfolio before and I've got some experience in that. I'm trying to now understand: what is our decision-making process here, how does it start? That's why my team find, perhaps, the way I operate slightly different to some other Ministers, because I am focusing on what's our starting position here rather than a policy-led civil service expert group pushing an agenda forward. My objective would be: what's your experience of this and what's the problem we've got to resolve? So, I'm talking to people you may be familiar with around domestic violence services, which comes under my remit as well now. So, I'm talking to Rachel Court, a domestic violence survivor, who knows—her experience is invaluable to what we think is going to happen in that process. But actually talking to people. So, children play that important role as well. So, I'm saying to my team, 'Evidence to me', because the commissioner will be asking me this: 'What have you done to engage young people and develop policy?' So, my view is: start at the other end, turn the lens round, let's start about people and let's work our policy backwards.

[224] **Lynne Neagle:** I've got a question in relation to that. The previous committee had a particular bugbear about the publication of children's rights impact assessments, and we were very keen to see more openness in terms of that whole process. I just wondered how you saw your role in taking that forward, how open you're planning to be with the CRIAs, and also how you plan to use your role, as children's Minister, to drive that open CRIA process with other Ministers.

[225] **Carl Sargeant:** I think there is a very different way Government is operating in this term already. There is a closer synergy. It's an instruction by the First Minister about how we integrate our policy developments. One example, not for this forum, but one of my other commitments, is around delivering 20,000 new homes in Wales, which is another huge challenge, but we'll do it. I was talking to Ken Skates, the Minister for the economy, the other day about this opportunity and the challenges that I face. His words were: 'Your 20,000 homes delivery plan isn't your problem; it's our problem'. I found that incredibly relieving in terms of that it wasn't just mine; we had to think about the Government. So, the cross-party operation of Government now is inbred in terms of how we're going to start doing business. So, the issue for children—and it's a great lever for me because, policy-wise, I say to all of my colleagues across the Cabinet, 'You have to have consideration for children, and I will be pushing you very hard. So, whether that's in education or whether that's in economic development, what is it you're doing to ensure that children are in that space?' I will be very open about that. If we're failing in that position or not delivering on that, I'm quite happy to say that, because it's a Government responsibility. Our young people are very important to making sure we get the right Wales for the future.

[226] **Lynne Neagle:** Do you still see the CRIA as a key part of that?

[227] **Carl Sargeant:** I'll have to give that some more thought in terms of how I want to make sure you have confidence in challenging us and seeing what's happening in the environment. I will drop the committee a note on that specifically.

[228] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. Thank you. If there are no other questions to the Minister, can I thank him for his attendance today, and also the officials who have attended as well? I think it's been a really useful run-through of a wide range of issues in his portfolio. So, thank you very much for your time.

[229] **Carl Sargeant:** Thank you.

11:39

Papur i'w Nodi
Paper to Note

[230] **Lynne Neagle:** Okay. We'll move on now, then, to item 4, which is papers to note. We've got one paper to note, which is the correspondence from the Presiding Officer to myself as Chair of this committee. It just sets out the Assembly's expectations and the support available. Are Members happy to note that? Thank you.

11:40

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42(ix) i Benderfynu Gwahardd y
Cyhoedd o Weddill y Cyfarfod**
**Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to Resolve to Exclude the
Public from the Remainder of the Meeting**

Cynnig:

Motion:

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

*accordance with Standing Order
17.42(ix).*

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.

Motion moved.

[231] **Lynne Neagle:** Item 5, then. Can I propose, in accordance with Standing Order 17.42(ix) that the committee now resolves to meet in private for the remainder of this meeting? Are Members content? Thank you.

Derbyniwyd y cynnig.

Motion agreed.

Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 11:40.
The public part of the meeting ended at 11:40.

