

# Education, young people and future generations

## Research Briefing

December 2025



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# Education, young people and future generations

## Research Briefing

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The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister is holding a session on 12 December 2025 with the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, focusing on issues relating to education, young people and future generations.

This briefing sets out relevant background information and some of the key issues the Committee may cover.



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## 1. Introduction

On **12 December 2025**, the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister is scrutinising the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, on issues relating to education, young people and future generations.

The Committee held a **session with the First Minister in July on Welsh Government delivery**, to mark almost one year since Eluned Morgan MS took office. Educational standards was one of the **areas that the Committee intended to scrutinise**, although was **unable to do so due to time restrictions**. The **Committee wrote** to the First Minister with several education-related questions and received a **response in September**. These questions focused on:

- any evidence that educational standards are improving;
- school improvement arrangements and the School Improvement Partnership Programme;
- pupil attendance and behaviour;
- inequalities in attainment (the ‘attainment gap’); and
- Additional Learning Needs (ALN).

The Committee decided to focus on education in its next themed session as part of a broader theme, which includes options and opportunities for young people beyond compulsory school age and the future generations agenda.

## 2. The First Minister’s four priorities

One of the matters covered in the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister’s follow up letter to its meeting of 11 July was a request for clarification of the First Minister’s priorities. Shortly after becoming First Minister, in September 2024 Eluned Morgan MS set **four priorities** for her government. During the **11 July session**, the First Minister said she had **changed the wording of the priorities** to “simplify it a bit” and “make it as easy as possible for people to understand what we’re doing”. She added “we’ve sharpened our focus”.

The wording of the Welsh Government’s **motion for a Plenary debate on 15 July** (on Delivering the Government’s Priorities and Legislative Programme) indicated the four priorities were now: **better health; more jobs; better transport; and more homes**. The **Committee wrote to the First Minister**, asking her to confirm what her four priorities now were and whether changes in wording were a simplification



exercise or if they represented a more substantial change in focus.

The **First Minister's response (17 September 2025)** confirmed that **the four priorities no longer include “boosting standards in schools and colleges”**, unlike in the priorities announced in September 2024:

The Welsh Government remains focussed on those things that have the biggest impact – delivering Better Health and Better Transport, More Homes and More Jobs. These priorities ensure we give extra attention to making change happen on the things that the people of Wales have told me matter the most. The priorities are about focussing our efforts in the time left to this government on actions we can really monitor and transform. It is about identifying tangible change and devoting additional effort to ensure it happens.

She did, however, add that the Welsh Government would **continue to deliver its Programme for Government, and its longer-term ambitions to raise educational standards**, mitigate the impact of climate change, deliver on major infrastructure projects and grow the economy.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education has maintained during two recent scrutiny sessions with the Children, Young People and Education Committee (on **6 November** and **27 November**) that education is a priority for the Welsh Government. However, she did not address the change in the First Minister's priorities.

A similar change occurred to another of the priorities whereby **the “green” and “accelerating planning decisions” elements of the jobs and growth priority are no longer explicitly included**. The table below shows the wording of the First Minister's priorities as announced in September 2024 and as ‘simplified’ in summer 2025.



Table 1: The First Minister’s four stated priorities

September 2024	Summer 2025
<b>‘Iechyd da’ – A Healthier Wales:</b> cutting NHS waiting times including for mental health, improving access to social care, and services for women’s health.	<b>Better Health</b>
<b>Green jobs and growth:</b> creating green jobs that tackle the climate crisis and restore nature, while making families better off; accelerating planning decisions to grow the Welsh economy.	<b>More Jobs</b>
<b>Opportunity for every family:</b> boosting standards in schools and colleges, and providing more homes for social rent, ensuring every family has the chance to succeed.	<b>More Homes</b>
<b>Connecting communities:</b> transforming our railways and delivering a better bus network; fixing our roads and empowering local communities to make choices on 20mph.	<b>Better Transport</b>

Sources: Welsh Government, [“We have listened, we have learned and we will deliver” - FM announces Welsh Government priorities, 17 September 2024](#); [Letter from the First Minister to the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister, 17 September 2025](#)

### 3. Education

The Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee has recently held sessions with the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle MS, on:

- School improvement and learner attainment (**6 November 2025**); and
- Implementation of curriculum and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reform (**23 October 2025**).

## Funding for the Welsh Government's education priorities

The **Cabinet Secretary for Education has said** her priorities are:

improving **attendance** and raising attainment in **literacy** and **numeracy**, supported by ongoing reforms to the **curriculum** and Additional Learning Needs (**ALN**). At the heart of these efforts is a commitment to promoting **well-being** across schools, which underpins the success of all reforms. [Bold is our emphasis.]

### Allocations in the draft budget

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During scrutiny of the 2026-27 Draft Budget, the **Cabinet Secretary told the CYPE Committee** she had done what she could “within the constraints of a 2.2 per cent roll-over budget to protect the priorities that [she has] set out”. She referred to the pressures on the education sector as a result of the Welsh Government’s decision to present a largely rollover budget. She **was also clear** about where she would like to spend additional money should education receive a share of the currently unallocated £380 million that is available for allocation before the Final Budget 2026-27 is presented in January.

The Cabinet Secretary said core funding for schools via local authorities should be prioritised. On 9 December, the Welsh Government announced it had reached an **agreement with Plaid Cymru** that would enable the 2026-27 budget to be passed. This includes an extra £113 million for local government, which will see an overall 4.5% increase for councils, compared to the 2.7% **provisionally allocated**.

The Welsh Government has allocated additional funding towards improving attendance rates, allocating £7 million more in 2025-26 and in addition to that a further £2.5 million in the **2026-27 Draft Budget**. This money is being spent on Family Engagement Officers (FEOs), Community Focussed Schools (CFS) initiatives and additional enrichment and engagement activities in school holidays.

The Welsh Government has also put in place national support programmes for **literacy** and **numeracy**, allocating £10 million for these areas in **2025-26** and a further £2 million in 2026-27 for supporting these within the Curriculum for Wales. It has also increased the ‘School Standards’ element of the Local Authority Education Grant (LAEG) by £9 million in the 2026-27 Draft Budget, taking spending on this up to £178 million.

The education sector is implementing two major pieces of legislation passed in the previous Senedd: the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 and the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (see later

section of this briefing). The **CYPE Committee has scrutinised** the implementation of these reforms. There is an additional £5 million in 2026-27 for delivering the ALN reforms, which follows £10 million allocated in 2025-26.

In relation to well-being, there is a **statutory framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing**, which was launched in 2021. There is an extra £670,000 to support delivery against this in the 2026-27 Draft Budget, bringing funding up to £7.3 million from the Education budget and £7 million from the Health and Social Care budget.

## Learner attainment

The **Cabinet Secretary for Education's paper to the CYPE Committee** for its 6 November session contains information and data on learner attainment (section 3 of her paper). This briefing does not seek to replicate that but to provide some 'added value' in analysis of the data and further context.

### Key Stage 4 (GCSE) outcomes

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The performance indicators that are currently used are 'interim' because new long-term measures are being developed to align with the Curriculum for Wales. In early 2025, the Welsh Government **consulted on a '14 to 16 Learner Entitlement Indicators Framework'**, to support reporting against that entitlement as set out in **statutory guidance on the curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds**. Performance measures, aligned with the 14 to 16 Learner Entitlement Framework will be used for the first time in summer 2027, coinciding with the first cohort to sit new qualifications and complete Year 11 under the Curriculum for Wales.

There are five headline measures that are currently used in the interim. The **Capped 9 points score** takes the average scores of learners, capped at a volume of 9 GCSEs or equivalent qualifications, with requirements for a GCSE in each of a literacy, numeracy and science subject. Points are given for GCSE grades on a descending basis from A\*-G (for example, each A\* is worth 58 points and each G worth 16 points).

Indicators are also used for the average points across the whole cohort, generated by the average grades individuals achieved in GCSEs in qualifications in each of **literacy, numeracy** and **science** subjects. There is also a score reported for average performance in the **Skills Challenge Certificate**.

Table 2 below shows the average points achieved by all pupils in each of these

indicators over recent years. Table 3 provides data, which looks at actual GCSE grades, rather than the performance indicators.

**Table 2: Key Stage 4 performance indicators (average points achieved by all pupils)**

	Capped 9 score	Literacy score	Numeracy score	Science score	Skills Challenge Certificate score
<b>2018/19</b>	<b>354.4</b>	<b>39.0</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>36.4</b>
<b>2022/23</b>	<b>358.1</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>36.9</b>	<b>31.6</b>
<b>2023/24</b>	<b>352.1</b>	<b>38.5</b>	<b>35.9</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>30.2</b>
<b>2024/25</b>	<b>354.3</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>29.0</b>

Note: Performance indicators were suspended in 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22 because of the pandemic.

Source: Welsh Government, [Examination results September 2024 to August 2025](#), Table 1, 4 December 2025

**Table 3: GCSE results for Year 11 pupils (all subjects)**

	<i>% of entries achieved at grade</i>		
	A*-A	A*-C	A*-G
<b>2015/16</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>71.9</b>	<b>98.9</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	<b>19.5</b>	<b>65.1</b>	<b>96.9</b>
<b>2019/20</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>74.9</b>	<b>99.4</b>
<b>2020/21</b>	<b>29.5</b>	<b>75.1</b>	<b>98.6</b>
<b>2021/22</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>70.1</b>	<b>96.6</b>
<b>2022/23</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>96.3</b>
<b>2023/24</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>63.8</b>	<b>96.1</b>
<b>2024/25</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>63.9</b>	<b>96.5</b>

Notes:

There were no exams in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and grades were awarded and determined by centres

(schools) with oversight from WJEC and Qualifications Wales. Exams resumed in 2021/22, although 2021/22 and 2022/23 were 'transition years' where grading was more generous in order to achieve a gradual transition back to pre-pandemic levels.

2015/16 is the first year in the data series published by the Welsh Government and is used here as a reference year. 2018/19 is used as the last pre-pandemic year.

Source: Welsh Government, [Examination results September 2024 to August 2025](#), Table 4a, 4 December 2025

The different awarding arrangements that had to be put in place during the pandemic period and transition years make comparisons between recent years difficult. However, comparing the latest results with the position prior to the pandemic:

- The Capped 9 points score and indicators in Literacy, Numeracy and Science are **fairly similar in 2025** to pre-pandemic in 2019, although the Skills Challenge Certificate score is somewhat lower.
- Looking at GCSE data, the rate of grades A\*-A is fairly similar in 2025 to pre-pandemic in 2019 and further back to 2016, while **grades A\*-C are quite similar to 2019 but quite a lot lower than 2016** – eight percentage points lower in 2025 than in 2016.
- See the [CYPE Committee transcript of 6 November 2025](#) (paragraphs 93-94) for the Cabinet Secretary for Education's comments in this regard.

## Attainment gaps

While the data around the pandemic period cannot tell us much about the system's educational comparative performance between recent years, analysis can be conducted of what happened to the **relative** attainment of deprived pupils and their peers. Free school meal (FSM) eligibility status is the historically used proxy for deprivation.

Table 4 below shows what happened to the FSM GCSE attainment gap during the past decade.

**Table 4: GCSE results for Year 11 pupils by FSM eligibility (all subjects)**

% of entries achieved at grade									
A*-A				A*-C			A*-G		
	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap
2015/16	8.0%	22.6%	14.6	50.0%	74.9%	24.9	96.6%	99.2%	2.4
2018/19	6.6%	21.4%	14.8	40.7%	68.8%	28.1	92.0%	97.7%	5.7
2019/20	10.7%	28.5%	17.8	53.6%	78.3%	24.7	98.1%	99.6%	1.5
2020/21	11.8%	33.2%	21.4	52.5%	79.8%	27.3	96.1%	99.1%	3.0
2021/22	9.9%	29.1%	19.2	47.1%	74.9%	27.8	91.4%	97.7%	6.3
2022/23	8.2%	24.9%	16.7	41.1%	70.9%	29.8	89.8%	97.5%	7.7
2023/24	7.4%	22.2%	14.8	39.6%	68.4%	28.8	89.7%	97.3%	7.6
2024/25	7.0%	22.3%	15.3	39.0%	68.3%	29.3	90.5%	97.6%	7.1

Notes:

There were no exams in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and grades were awarded and determined by centres (schools) with oversight from WJEC and Qualifications Wales. Exams resumed in 2021/22, although 2021/22 and 2022/23 were 'transition years' where grading was more generous in order to achieve a gradual transition back to pre-pandemic levels.

2015/16 is the first year in the data series published by the Welsh Government and is used here as a reference year. 2018/19 is used as the last pre-pandemic year.

Source: Welsh Government, **Examination results September 2025**, Table 5b, 4 December 2025

The FSM attainment gap is relatively similar (albeit slightly wider) in 2025 to what it was pre-pandemic in 2019 but looking further back is **four and half percentage points wider at grades A\*-C than it was in 2016, such that it is now almost 30 percentage points**. This is despite tackling the attainment gap having been a priority for many years and the substantial Welsh Government investment in the **Pupil Development Grant (PDG)** since around 2012 (currently £128 million per year). The PDG supplements schools' annual budgets by £1,150 per eligible child – pupils who are eFSM or Looked After.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education told the **CYPE Committee on 6 November** she was “disappointed” and “really frustrated” that more progress had not been made in narrowing the attainment gap.

## A Level outcomes

Table 5 below shows what has happened to A level results over recent years.

**Table 5: A level results for students aged 17 at start of year (Year 13) (all subjects)**

	<i>% of entries achieved at grade</i>		
	A*-A	A*-C	A*-E
2015/16	21.2	74.8	99.1
2018/19	25.5	76.7	99.3
2019/20	41.3	92.2	100.0
2020/21	49.0	90.6	100.0
2021/22	41.4	86.8	99.9
2022/23	34.2	80.5	99.5
2023/24	29.9	77.9	99.5
2024/25	29.9	78.6	99.6

Notes:

There were no exams in 2019/20 and 2020/21 and grades were awarded and determined by centres (schools) with oversight from WJEC and Qualifications Wales. Exams resumed in 2021/22, although 2021/22 and 2022/23 were ‘transition years’ where grading was more generous in order to achieve a gradual transition back to pre-pandemic levels.

2015/16 is the first year in the data series published by the Welsh Government and is used here as a reference year. 2018/19 is used as the last pre-pandemic year.

Source: Welsh Government, **Examination results September 2024 to August 2025**, Table 7, 4 December 2025



A level results in 2025 are **higher than pre-pandemic in 2019**, with the scale of **improvement even greater over a longer period of time**.

- The proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-A is four and a half percentage points higher than 2019 and two percentage points higher at grades A\*-C.
- Looking further back to 2016, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-A is almost nine percentage points higher and almost four percentage points higher at grades A\*-C.

A level results in Wales are higher than in England (overall across all sectors). They are lower than in secondary selective schools or Free schools in England but higher than in all state funded education combined in England.

- The **A\*-A rate of 29.9% in Wales compares to 28.2% in England overall; 25.2% in all state funded education in England**; 23.1% in Academies; 31.3% in Free schools; 22.6% in secondary comprehensive or middle schools; 16.3% in secondary modern / high schools; and 43.7% in secondary selective schools.
- The **A\*-C rate of 78.6% in Wales compares to 77.7% in England overall; 76.3% in all state funded education in England**; 75.0% in Academies; 80.6% in Free schools; 75.2% in secondary comprehensive or middle schools; 64.8% in secondary modern / high school; and 88.2% in secondary selective schools.
- Of all the English regions, **only London and the South East had higher** A level results than Wales at A\*-A and A\*-C. (All statistics from Tables 10 and 11 of [Ofqual data](#))

## Personalised assessments (Years 2 to 9)

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**Personalised assessments** are taken annually by pupils in Years 2 to 9 in English reading, Welsh reading, numeracy (procedural) and numeracy (reasoning). They **evolved from the National Reading and Numeracy tests**, which were introduced in 2013 as part of the **Welsh Government's prioritisation of literacy and numeracy** within a 'twenty point plan' to respond to Wales' disappointing Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results.

In line with the Welsh Government's adopted principle of the primary purpose of assessment being to inform teaching and learning, rather than for school accountability, personalised assessment results are not published at a school or local authority level. However, the Welsh Government began publishing national aggregated data in November 2023, which showed a decline in reading and numeracy levels, coinciding with the pandemic.

The **latest data (for 2023/24)**, published in June 2025, uses **2022/2023 as a reference year** for each of the four domains – numeracy (procedural), numeracy (reasoning), English reading, and Welsh reading – and compares subsequent years and previous years 2018/19, 2020/21 and 2021/22 where these are available. (Online personalised assessments were phased in at different timescales across the four domains. In any case, there is no data for 2019/20 due to personalised assessments generally not being taken in that year because of the pandemic.)

This data measures the level cohorts (Year 3, Year 6 and Year 9) are at, compared to the same year group in other years in terms of ‘x’ months behind or ahead. The main comparison is with 2022/23 as the reference year, although it can also be used to compare with other years in the data series.

- **English reading:** The data series starts at 2020/21. Pupils’ attainment was at its lowest level in 2022/23, although attainment has recovered since with 2023/24 levels in Year 3 being higher than any other year. Attainment in Years 6 and 9 remain lower than in 2020/21.
- **Welsh reading:** The data series starts at 2020/21. As with English reading, attainment was at its lowest level in 2022/23. While there is some recovery since, 2023/24 attainment remains lower than 2020/21, particularly in Year 9.
- **Numeracy (procedural):** The data series starts at 2018/19. Attainment in 2023/24 has increased since 2021/22 when it was at its lowest, although it remains lower than 2018/19. Recovery has been greater in Year 3 and Year 6 than Year 9.
- **Numeracy (reasoning):** Data is only available since 2021/22 as it was the last assessment to be introduced in the phased roll-out. Attainment in 2023/24 is at its highest over the three-year period in Years 3 and Years 6, but Year 9 attainment is at its lowest.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education told the CYPE Committee on 6 November that she was encouraged by the progress that younger learners are making, particularly in Year 3. However, she acknowledged that there has not been the same progress at Year 9. (See **paragraphs 144-156** of the transcript regarding reading and **paragraphs 190-204** for numeracy.)

## **The approach to teaching reading in Wales**

There has been some debate about the recommended approach to teaching children to read in Wales. This has focused on whether **‘systematic synthetic phonics’** should be the main, or only, technique for learning to read. The Welsh

Government made some **changes to sections of its statutory guidance** on the Curriculum for Wales in **January 2025**, to make it “clear that the systematic and consistent teaching of phonics must be a key part of schools’ approach to reading”. It also clarified guidance on the use of ‘cueing’ – the practice of using the context and appearance of a word within a sentence to deduce/guess what it is. The guidance “does not advocate the use of pictures to help learners to decode words”.

The debate has recently been given new impetus with the **resignation** from the **Welsh Government’s Expert Literacy Panel** of Elizabeth Nonweiler, Chair of the Reading Reform Foundation. In a **published letter to the Cabinet Secretary**, Ms Nonweiler warned that the recently announced **£8.2 million ‘CAL:ON literacy project at Bangor University** is “being led by individuals who do not clearly support the proven principles of systematic synthetic phonics”. She said:

Synthetic phonics – teaching children to decode words by blending sounds – is backed by decades of research and proven success in classrooms worldwide. I **know of no reliable evidence** that shows other methods work better for teaching word reading, **nor that combining them with synthetic phonics works better**. [Bold is our emphasis.]

The Cabinet Secretary was asked about this issue in **CYPE Committee on 6 November** when she said the expert panel was in agreement that “**phonics is an absolutely key part** of teaching reading to children”. She added that systematic synthetic phonics “**should be used with a range of additional approaches** to developing wider literacy skills, including fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, especially for learners who have ALN”. **Estyn have also said** a combination of reading strategies should be used.

The panel is due to submit a report and recommendations to the Welsh Government in December.

## School improvement and the ‘national mission’ to raise standards

### The move away from regional working to local authority-based partnerships

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There have been recent changes to school improvement services, following a **review of the roles and responsibilities of education partners and the delivery of school improvement arrangements** undertaken by Professor Dylan Jones (commonly referred to as the ‘**middle tier review**’). The Welsh Government has established a ‘**School improvement partnership programme**’, with new local authority partnerships being developed to replace the regional consortia under a

model advocated by Professor Jones' review.

This Senedd Research article of September 2025, "[\*\*What's happening to school improvement services?\*\*](#)" provides more detail, including the origins and history of regional working and what the middle tier review reported. In summary, regional consortia were established from 2013 onwards due to concerns about local authorities' ability to improve education under the existing set up. The **consortia were therefore seen by the Welsh Government for many years as a major part of the solution** to the imperative of improving education. However, the Welsh Government now feels that things have moved on and local authorities are now better placed to lead on school improvement. The onus is now back operationally, as well as (has always been the case) statutorily, with local authorities.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education told the CYPE Committee on [\*\*6 November 2025 \(paragraphs 12-94\)\*\*](#):

What I'd say is that the consortia were established in response to the issues that we faced in the system back in 2014, 2015. And they did make a significant contribution to support at that time, especially in respect of the new curriculum roll-out. The challenges we faced at that time were very different. We had multiple local authorities in special measures or other Estyn escalation. So, that was a system that helped us at that time. Obviously, a lot has changed now. We've had a range of new reforms, and what the review highlighted is that we needed a fresh approach to support our schools in the current climate. (...)

... I don't think we're going back to the same system. I think we're in a very different place now to what we were before the consortia came in. As I said, local authorities were not in a strong position at all to lead this work back then. They have always had the statutory responsibility for school improvement. That is their legal duty.

## **Estyn's observations**

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Estyn's Chief Inspector (HMCI) publishes an annual report of what Estyn has found during the past year during its inspections, giving its observations about the performance of the education system. The latest of these is for academic year 2023/24. This [\*\*Senedd Research article\*\*](#) summarises what HMCI reported, ahead of a [\*\*Plenary debate on 18 March 2025\*\*](#).

Estyn has recently published its "[\*\*Early Insights 2024/25\*\*](#)" as an interim update ahead of the publication of the 2024/25 annual report in February 2026. In [\*\*Plenary on 22 October\*\*](#), the Cabinet Secretary welcomed Estyn's "positive messages" around well-being, learner engagement, ALN and curriculum innovation.

Estyn's early insights regarding **nursery settings and primary schools are relatively positive**, with an emphasis on 'most' or the 'majority' of cases where provision is good. Where things do need to improve, this is described as being in 'a few' or 'minority' of cases. For example, only 16 of 207 primary schools inspected in 2024/25 required follow-up (32 of 259 in 2023/24.)

## Secondary schools

However, the position is different for **secondary schools**. In some key aspects of teaching and learning, Estyn describes things as going well in a 'minority' of secondary schools and **things needing to improve in a 'majority'**. For example:

- Teachers plan lessons that secure strong progress in **pupil subject knowledge and understanding** in only a minority of cases.
- There is suitable planning for the **progressive development of pupils' literacy numeracy and digital skills** in only a minority of schools. This remains underdeveloped in the majority of schools.
- In two-thirds of schools, there are **shortcomings in aspects of teaching** in at least a minority of lessons, in particular poor planning for learning.
- Too often in maths lessons, teachers do not teach the **understanding of mathematical concepts** securely enough; they teach procedural shortcuts rather than helping pupils understand these concepts and make connections between topics.
- Teaching and provision for **Welsh** in the majority of **English medium** schools is not strong enough.
- In two-thirds of schools, **leadership** is not effective enough in ensuring consistent good quality teaching.
- Consequently, **13 of the 30** secondary schools inspected in 2024/25 required **follow-up** (10 of 31 in **2023/24**).

In March, the **CYPE Committee asked Estyn** why similar shortcomings persist in secondary schools year to year and just how concerning the situation is. Estyn described the range of challenges facing secondary schools, including ALN and curriculum reform, changes to qualifications, behaviour, pupils' emotional and mental health, and attendance.

Estyn said this "makes the leadership of secondary schools very demanding" and the fact that 10% of secondary schools are in a **statutory category** (special

measures or requiring significant improvement) is “really worrying”. Estyn has confirmed to Senedd Research that, as of 1 December 2025, **22 of 173 secondary schools (13%) are in one of the two statutory categories**. 11 are in special measures and 11 require significant improvement.

Estyn also told the CYPE Committee that when considering all the issues secondary schools are struggling with, “**you can identify some serious concerns about the quality of leadership**”. The functions of the National Academy for Educational Leadership are being rolled into the **new national professional learning and leadership body, Dysgu**.

The Cabinet Secretary has also announced a **review of school governing bodies**.

## ALN reform

Partly in response to the **CYPE Committee’s scrutiny**, the Cabinet Secretary for Education instigated a reform of the way the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system is being implemented. The **CYPE Committee’s report of July 2024** and the **Welsh Government’s subsequent review** highlighted inconsistency and confusion surrounding the two key parts of the legal definition of ALN – a ‘significantly greater difficulty in learning’ and distinguishing ‘Additional Learning Provision’ (ALP) from what is ‘generally made available’.

The Cabinet Secretary had said she wanted to “get under the skin” (paragraphs 8 and 35 of **8 May 2024 CYPE transcript**) of what lay behind the **53% decrease in the number of pupils identified (or recognised) as having ALN over the four years since the new system was first introduced**. (From 92,668 (19.5% of all pupils) in **2020/21** to 43,885 (9.5% of all pupils) in **2024/25**.) This decrease has occurred despite the legal definition of ALN being the same as previously for Special Educational Needs (SEN), leading to questions as to **whether the definition was being more rigorously applied and the bar for what constitutes ALN had been raised**. It also comes at the same time as the **Welsh Government acknowledges** more children are presenting with more complex needs, raising questions about how and whether their needs are being met.

On 14 October 2025, the **Cabinet Secretary set out five areas of action** the Welsh Government is taking following its review. These include clarifying the key definitions and publishing new guidance either before or after the New Year. The ALN Code, which is the key document setting out how the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 should work in practice, will need to be revised although the Cabinet Secretary said there is not enough time to do this



before the Senedd election in May 2026.

Improving support for families is another of the key actions and the Welsh Government published a [new information toolkit for parents and carers](#) on 19 November.

There is no actual overarching report of the Welsh Government’s review, although further information can be found in:

- this [Senedd Research article](#), (published ahead of the [Cabinet Secretary’s oral statement](#) of 14 October);
- [Summary of \(the approximately 50\) responses](#) to the Welsh Government’s request for information to inform the review;
- [evidence submitted to the Welsh Government by Judge Jane McConnell](#), President of the Education Tribunal for Wales;
- [Report of a survey of parents and carers](#) (undertaken by Arad as part of its four-year formative evaluation);
- the [CYPE Committee’s session with the Cabinet Secretary](#) on 23 October 2025.

## Pupil attendance and behaviour

### Attendance

Pupil attendance reduced sharply as a result of the pandemic and has been to slow to recover, such that it remains considerably below the pre-pandemic level of 2018/19. This has been the subject of [Estyn reports](#), [Committee scrutiny](#) and [Welsh Government action](#). Most recently, the Cabinet Secretary for Education made a [statement in Plenary](#) on 25 November 2025.

**Table 6: Percentage of half day sessions attended**

	% of sessions attended		
	All schools	Primary schools	Secondary schools
2018/19	94.3	94.7	93.9
2022/23	89.9	91.5	87.6
2023/24	90.5	92.2	88.0
2024/25	90.9	92.6	88.8

Source: Welsh Government, [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 2 September to 21](#)



**November 2025**, Tables 1 & 2, 2 December 2025 (latest available at time of writing)

The Welsh Government publishes **attendance data on a fortnightly basis**, which presents a cumulative picture for the current academic year, as well as the full-year picture for previous years. Very recent attendance figures are therefore available, although should not be compared with full-year figures as attendance patterns fluctuate throughout the year and often tend to be higher in the autumn stages. However, it can be seen that attendance in 2025/26 to date (up to 21 November) is:

- 91.7% in all schools, compared to 91.7% in the same period in 2024/25;
- 93.3% in primary schools, compared to 93.3% in the same period in 2024/25; and
- 90.1% in secondary schools, compared to 90.0% in the same period in 2024/25.

As can be seen in Table 7 below, the attendance of pupils eFSM is lower than other pupils and this gap is larger than it was pre-pandemic. For example, in secondary schools it is twice as wide at 10 percentage points in 2024/25 than it was in 2018/19.

**Table 7: Percentage of half-day sessions attended, by school sector and FSM status**

<i>% of sessions attended</i>			
Primary schools			
	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap
2018/19	92.1	95.3	3.2
2022/23	87.1	92.9	5.8
2023/24	87.9	93.4	5.5
2024/25	88.3	93.8	5.5
Secondary schools			
	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap
2018/19	89.5	94.7	5.2
2022/23	79.4	89.8	10.4
2023/24	79.9	90.2	10.3
2024/25	80.9	91.0	10.1

Source: Welsh Government, **Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 2 September to 21 November 2025**, Table 4, 2 December 2025 (latest available at time of writing)

Persistent absence

Another legacy of the pandemic is that more pupils are missing school more often, as shown by Table 8 below. ‘Persistence absence’ means missing more than 10% of school sessions. While it has reduced from the high of 40% in 2022/23, a fifth of primary school-aged pupils and a third of secondary school-aged pupils were absent for more than 10% of the time in 2024/25.

Table 8: Persistence absence (more than 10%)

	% of pupils missing 10% or more of sessions		
	All schools	Primary schools	Secondary schools
2018/19	14.7	12.9	17.1
2022/23	34.0	28.9	40.1
2023/24	30.4	24.7	37.1
2024/25	26.3	20.1	33.1

Source: Welsh Government, [Attendance of pupils in maintained schools: 2 September to 21 November 2025](#), Tables 10 & 11 4, 2 December 2025 (latest available at time of writing)

As with attendance generally, persistent absence is higher among pupils eFSM. As Table 9 below shows, 45% of primary school-aged pupils and 58% of secondary school-aged pupils were persistently absent in 2024/25.

**Table 9: Persistent absence by FSM eligibility**

<i>% of pupils missing 10% or more of sessions</i>			
Primary school-aged			
	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap
2018/19	26.9	9.7	17.2
2022/23	51.8	22.4	29.4
2023/24	46.9	18.8	28.1
2024/25	44.7	16.0	28.7
Secondary school-aged			
	eFSM	Not eFSM	% point gap
2018/19	35.5	13.4	22.1
2022/23	64.3	33.9	30.4
2023/24	61.4	30.9	30.5
2024/25	58.0	26.8	31.2

Source: Welsh Government, [Attendance and absence from primary schools: September 2024 to August 2025](#), Table 11 and [Attendance and absence from secondary schools: September 2024 to August 2025](#), Table 11

## Behaviour

There have also been concerns around pupil behaviour and the impact this is having on educational outcomes and well-being. A [Senedd Research article of May 2025](#) discusses this topic. This was around the time the Welsh Government held a **‘round table on violence and safety in schools and colleges’** and a **‘national behaviour summit’**.

Since then, the Cabinet Secretary has set out **‘five immediate actions’**; published a **report of the summit**; established two forums to consider the “critical areas” of mobile phone and social media use in schools, and issues surrounding exclusions and detentions; and as well as issuing a **written statement on 23 July** and a recent **oral statement on 25 November**.

The **Welsh Youth Parliament's Committee on Crime and Behaviour** has recently published its report, having heard from over 2,000 young people in its consultation. The **Cabinet Secretary has accepted** all eight of its recommendations and said the "Committee's report is an outstanding example of pupil voice".

The Senedd Research article included some **analysis of exclusion data**, which showed that, between 2018/19 and 2022/23, **fixed short-term exclusions of five days or less had increased from 75 to 131 per 1,000 secondary school pupils**.

## 4. Young people beyond compulsory school age

### Post-16 education

#### Destinations from Year 11

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During the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee's inquiry into **Routes into Post-16 Education and Training**, the most commonly raised concern was how some schools with sixth forms promote their own sixth form courses over other post-16 options. Evidence provided by stakeholders such as **Colegau Cymru** and **Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru** suggested this was influenced by the current funding model, driving competition between different types of providers.

However, the **National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers** posited that colleges' concerns about this lack of access to learners is not reflected by the data. They point to the fact that in Wales, a larger share of young people study in colleges than any other UK nation and the percentage of young people studying in sixth forms is falling.

Careers Wales' Year 11 **pupil destination data** for 2024 confirms a greater share of those continuing in full-time education continued Year 12 in a further education college (61.5%) compared to a school (38.5%).

**Medr** indicated that, for the first time, the majority of learners progressing to post-16 education chose not to study AS levels (49% of learners progressing from Year 11 chose to study AS levels) in 2024/25.

#### Participation rates in further and higher education

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As for higher education, **Universities Wales** emphasised to the CYPE Committee

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that in 2024, “fewer people from Wales went to university than at any point in the past decade”. Additionally, it highlighted the participation gap for those aged 18 between Wales and the UK as a whole was its widest in recent history.

The **Open University** suggested falling participation rates in higher education contribute to young people becoming ‘not in education, employment or training’ (NEET), which is discussed further in section 4.2.1.

While accepting there is a downward trend in the number of 18-year-olds choosing to study at university, the **Welsh Government** explained more learners are studying below Level 3 at age 16-18, where being qualified to Level 3 was an essential pre-requisite of increasing higher education participation. The Minister for Further and Higher Education noted caution should be taken when considering the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data alone as this does not account for cases where learners are taking longer to decide on what and where to study.

Meanwhile, there is a significant rise in further education learners in Wales which the **Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle MS, told the CYPE Committee** during draft budget scrutiny on 27 November was “really good news”. However, she noted an inability to recognise this increased participation in the 2026-27 Draft Budget due to the constraints of a “2% roll-over budget”. Medr also informed the CYPE Committee during **budget scrutiny** that there is a significant pressure because of the increased participation in further education. It stated, “I think it’s fair to say that we’re expecting a pressure into the next year, as a result of this increased participation, and particularly if we see these trends continuing”.

Regarding the financial pressures facing further education, the Cabinet Secretary for Education **told the CYPE Committee** “we don’t want learners to be on waiting lists, we want to hold on to them in education”. The Minister for Further and Higher Education, Vikki Howells MS, then added “as the Cabinet Secretary said, we really don’t want our young people coming out of the education system and being placed on waiting lists for college places, because the danger is, once that happens, you might well have lost them for good”.

## **Financial challenges for further and higher education**

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The CYPE Committee’s Routes into Post-16 Education and Training report noted sixth forms, colleges of further education and higher education institutions are facing financial challenges.

Sixth forms were noted as experiencing financial challenges to remain viable, with

some schools using funds for pre-16 provision to subsidise sixth forms according to the **Chief Executive of Gower College Swansea**.

**ColegauCymru** raised concerns of financial challenges facing further education institutions, particularly noting difficulties related to the financial contingency fund and requiring enhanced funding for implementing ALN reforms.

**Challenges facing higher education in Wales** featured as a short piece of work conducted by the CYPE Committee. During an **evidence session on 21 May 2025**, Medr informed the CYPE Committee that there was no Welsh university at risk of financial failure in the immediate short-term.

The House of Commons Education Committee have been conducting a similar inquiry into higher education and funding. In their latest **evidence session**, the Chair noted a provider could collapse before the end of the year. However, Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister for Skills, challenged this. She said there is no such imminent collapse of an institution in England.

When asked how the Welsh Government is supporting Welsh universities in **Plenary on 4 March 2025**, the First Minister highlighted £28.5 million of additional grant funding that the Welsh Government has given the sector in addition to increasing the tuition fee cap twice (and has done so again **recently** – to apply from 1 August 2026).

## **Rates of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and employment support**

### **NEET rates**

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The Welsh Government's latest statistics on the **participation of young people in education and the labour market** provide final estimates for 2023 along with provisional estimates for 2024. Provisional estimates for 2024 indicate an increase of 16 to 24 year olds who are NEET from 13.2% in 2023 to 13.7%. As outlined in the CYPE Committee's **report** which considered previous provisional data for 2023, the proportion of 19 to 24 year olds who are NEET (14.7%) is greater than the proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who are NEET (11.7%).

In **Plenary on 11 March**, the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, Jack Sargeant MS, stated the Welsh Government is making solid progress towards its national milestone of "at least 90% of 16 to 24-year-olds are in education, employment or training by 2050". The Minister highlighted 85.8% of young people

were engaged in education, employment or training in 2022, which was an increase from 83.7% in 2021. The latest statistical release indicates this increased again to 86.8% in 2023 but has since decreased to 86.3% in 2024.

Various stakeholders are concerned about the rates of young people who are NEET in Wales. During a CYPE Committee **evidence session on 6 February 2025**, Medr described such figures as “persistent” and “unacceptable”.

Other concerns relate to disproportionate representation of individuals who are NEET. Research conducted by the **Learning and Work Institute** found young people with a health condition UK wide are more likely to be identified as NEET (a trend more pronounced in Wales). **Luke Fletcher MS has highlighted** that over 35% of disabled young people were NEET in the year ending September 2024.

There are also concerns regarding the NEET data collected which **Estyn** cautioned is “problematic” and may provide a “false sense of success” as not all young people sustain their post-16 destination. The **National Education Union** outline that the data does not identify specific causes.

In **Plenary on 25 November**, Mike Hedges MS asked what the Welsh Government is doing to reduce the number of young people who are NEET by promoting further education and how it was working with employers so learners can see well-paid jobs at the end of their courses. He commented that too often people see the courses but don’t see well-paid jobs at the end. In response, the Minister for Further and Higher Education referred to the importance of the Young Person’s Guarantee (YPG), which the Welsh Government is “very proud of”.

## **Young Person’s Guarantee**

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The **Welsh Government’s YPG aims** to provide young people aged 16 to 24 in Wales with an offer of support to gain a place in education, training, or an apprenticeship, find a job or become self-employed. The scheme has been highlighted as a **“cornerstone of the First Minister’s vision for Wales”** by the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership. There is a **Programme for Government** commitment to “deliver the YPG, giving everyone under 25 the offer of work, education, training or self-employment”. The YPG is stated to be complemented by the **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework**, which aims to support early identification of young people aged 11 to 18 at risk of becoming NEET.

Launched in 2021, the YPG is not a standalone programme but consists of a



number of Welsh Government programmes/ projects. **Written evidence** from the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership for recent budget scrutiny at the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee highlighted a number of key employability and skills programmes that have YPG elements:

- Jobs Growth Wales+;
- ReAct+;
- Communities for Work+;
- Inspiring Skills Excellence in Wales;
- Youth Entrepreneurship; and
- Careers Wales/ Working Wales.

In October 2025, the **First Minister informed the Senedd** that the YPG has engaged over 58,000 young people, which is an increase of 1,000 from the figure **reported** to the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister in July 2025.

A **process evaluation** of the YPG was published in September 2025 which indicated around 40-60% of young people supported by YPG programmes were assessed as achieving positive outcomes. The process evaluation also outlines it is not possible to calculate precisely how many young people do not take up support through the YPG though evidence suggests it is a substantial minority. Some groups such as disabled people and young women are under-represented in the numbers of those taking up support.

Young people have also raised concerns in Welsh Government 'National Conversations' about the YPG. According to the **Highlight Report** from March 2025, young people raised issues on matters such as the need for work experience, transport solutions and mental health support.

In **Plenary in September 2024**, Gareth Davies MS raised a concern that there should be more people in education, employment and training through the YPG. In response, the First Minister acknowledged youth unemployment rates are too high in Wales but suggested Wales is doing better than England, attributing this achievement to the YPG.

The YPG process evaluation suggested new strategies are likely vital if the Welsh Government target of 90% of young people being in education, employment or training by 2050 is to be realised. It also outlines that the YPG was a continuation and expansion of existing support as opposed to a radical change to the nature of support. However, the Rapid Evidence Review included within the process

evaluation indicated there is no ‘silver bullet’ and existing models work “at least moderately well”.

Acknowledging there is more to do, the **Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership informed** the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee that the Welsh Government is currently in the process of consulting on and developing its next employability support programme, with the timeline for procuring a new service being 2027.

## Apprenticeships

### General overview of apprenticeships

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The Welsh Government’s **Programme for Government** initially indicated a target of 125,000 all-age apprenticeship starts during this Senedd term. This was **later reduced to 100,000** attributed to the loss of funding from the European Social Fund, as confirmed by the then Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language in summer 2024. During **budget scrutiny** at the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee in November 2025, the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership stated he is confident that the Welsh Government will meet its revised target.

Medr publish the number of **apprenticeships learning programmes started** for each quarter with the latest (provisional) statistics indicating there were 3,895 apprenticeship learning programmes started in 2024/25 Q3, compared with 4,570 starts in 2023/24 Q3. In relation to the Welsh Government’s target of 100,000 apprenticeships, there have been 77,385 apprenticeship starts since Q4 2020/21. Progress towards this target can be viewed on Medr’s **interactive dashboard**.

There is also a **Programme for Government** commitment to “expand the use of shared and degree apprenticeships”. However, the 2026-27 Draft Budget maintains the current quantum of funding for degree apprenticeships at £9.411 million as set out in **written evidence** from the Cabinet Secretary for Education. There was limited information provided during budget scrutiny regarding how this commitment to expand this provision will be realised.

Regarding Welsh Government’s expenditure on apprenticeships, Medr’s 2025/26 **funding allocations** outline a five-year history of the apprenticeship budget as shown in Table 10 below:

**Table 10: Five year history of the apprenticeship budget**

Financial Year	Gross Apprenticeship budget (including European Social Funds) £ million	Welsh Government published £ million	European Social Funds addition £ million
2020-21	128.077	97.033	31.044
2021-22	139.868	113.533	26.335
2022-23	144.700	117.033	27.667
2023-24	181.448	138.898	42.550
2024-25	143.898	143.898	0

Source: Medr, [Medr/2025/06: Medr's funding allocations for academic year 2025/26](#), 6 August 2025

**Written evidence** provided to the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee for budget scrutiny by the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership stated the actual total outturn for apprenticeships in 2024-25 was £139.376 million. The forecast total outturn for 2025-26 is £143.906 million.

Medr recently held a **consultation** on the apprenticeship programme in Wales ahead of the new programme due to start on 1 August 2027.

### Construction apprenticeships

Medr's previous data release covering **apprenticeships learning programmes started** between November 2024 and January 2025 indicated a 48% decline (equal to 205 fewer individuals) in construction apprenticeships starts in 2024/25 Q2 compared to 2023/24 Q2. In **Plenary on 8 October 2025**, Mark Isherwood MS suggested that ColegauCymru attributes this decline to the removal of the Level 2 foundation apprenticeship and a 14% budget cut.

Mark Isherwood MS also reported a concern that colleges are reporting significant growth in core full-time numbers, which exceeds current funding levels. The **Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnerships subsequently wrote** to Mark Isherwood MS and indicated there has been no reduction in the apprenticeship budget over this Senedd term. He said that instead funding for apprenticeships has increased since 2020-21 from £128 million to £144 million this year even though European Social Funding came to an end in 2024-25.

Regarding the concerns on construction apprenticeships, the Minister states he has asked Medr and Qualifications Wales to bring forward proposals for new Level 2 construction apprenticeship qualifications and framework to be introduced as early as possible with a hope of making an announcement in the coming weeks. The Minister's discussions with Medr and Qualification Wales were first noted in **Plenary on 11 June 2025**, where the Minister stated he hoped to have something in place by September. Later on 17 July, the Minister **informed the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee** that he was unable to give a timeline on any implementations of such discussions but said he is keen to progress as fast as possible.

Concerns surrounding construction routes for young people have been raised to the First Minister directly. In **Plenary on 6 May 2025**, workforce issues in the construction sector were raised by Laura Anne Jones MS. In response the First Minister suggested "we need to start in GCSEs" and ensure learners have a pathway for them. The First Minister was **later asked on 17 June** about the decline in the number of construction apprenticeships. She responded by highlighting that the Welsh Government has invested £144 million in apprenticeships this year and are on target for 100,000 all-age apprenticeship starts in this Senedd term.

On 21 November 2025, the Welsh Government published a **Built Environment Sector Mission Statement** and a **digital action plan for the built environment sector**, though there is limited reference to apprenticeships in either publication. While the Mission Statement states Fair Work Principles will be promoted which may assist employers to collaboratively deliver apprenticeships / shared apprenticeships, the digital action plan states that the Welsh Government will "work closely with existing providers to expand on core digital skills within the Higher Education Qualification Suite and apprenticeship routes".

In September 2024, the UK Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities announced that the new **Growth and Skills Levy** (which builds on the previous apprenticeship levy in England) will include foundation apprenticeships. The first **foundation apprenticeships** went live in England on 1 August 2025 and include 'construction and the built environment'.

Regarding the Apprenticeship Levy in Wales, the **First Minister previously informed** the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister in March 2025 that there were clear differences between the UK Government's system and that in Wales. She suggested it would be useful to see how the UK Government's review of the apprenticeship levy could work with the programme in Wales.

## Skills shortages and economy investment

### Priority sectors and skills

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In **Plenary on 1 July 2025**, the First Minister outlined artificial intelligence (AI) is a priority sector for Wales and suggested it is important to refocus Wales' skills programme, with increased funding and flexibility, to support such priority areas. She continued to suggest "I was really pleased to make it clear that, in future, AI and digital skills will be taught in every Welsh secondary school". In addition, the First Minister suggested Welsh Government will establish AI centres of excellence.

More recently, when **responding to the UK budget** announced in November 2025, the First Minister stated "we will also see significant investment in Wales, including in AI Growth Zones, advanced manufacturing, steel transition in Port Talbot, and nuclear energy in Anglesey."

A **labour market information bulletin** published by Careers Wales in February 2025, highlighted that while an increase in job vacancies is positive news, the **Open University's Business Barometer 2024 report for Wales** notes some concerns. Notably, 47% of Welsh employers still report skill shortages and a lack of confidence in AI and green tech skills. 56% of Welsh employers say they are not confident in applying new AI technologies in their businesses.

Furthermore, a report from the King's Trust on the **Digital Skills Gap** from 2024 found 37% of young people in the UK do not study 'digital or tech subjects' beyond Key Stage 3 with 42% believing digital skills will not be essential to their career. The report further notes that disadvantaged young people (such as individuals characterised as NEET) show the least confidence and engagement with pursuing digital skills and jobs.

### Green jobs and training

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In November 2025, Careers Wales also published a labour market information bulletin dedicated to the **Green Economy in Wales**. The bulletin reports that "Wales is seeing a surge in green job advertisements, particularly in manufacturing, construction, and professional services." Though the bulletin suggests Wales is "recognised for its significant potential to lead the renewable energy sector", it also outlines that to realise opportunities it is essential to address critical challenges including closing skills gaps and enhancing education and training pathways.

Previously, green jobs featured explicitly within the First Minister's priorities, "Green jobs and growth: creating green jobs that tackle the climate crisis and restore nature, while making families better off; accelerating planning decisions to grow the Welsh economy". However, as outlined in section 2 of this briefing, the wording of the priority has now been reduced to "More Jobs".

## Investment Summit

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The Welsh Investment Summit took place on 1 December 2025 which was said to give more than 300 business leaders and global investors the opportunity to meet and explore investment opportunities in Wales. Among the attendees, Prince William highlighted how clean energy projects in Wales, such as floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea, are "creating new opportunities for investment, job creation and long-term prosperity" as **reported by the BBC**.

This BBC article also outlined that the First Minister believed that Westminster's recent announcement, of a new nuclear power station at Wylfa and AI growth zones in North and South Wales, reflected the "partnership of nations".

Ahead of the summit, the **First Minister announced** that new investments for Wales, since the Summit was launched, now total £16 billion. Regarding next steps, the First Minister said it was now important to build on these investments to ensure the jobs and economic benefits reach every part of Wales.

## Local Growth Fund

In the **Spending Review earlier this year** the UK Government set out headline details of its proposed new Local Growth Fund (LGF), which will replace **the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)** from April 2026. On 7 November, the Welsh Government **opened a consultation on its plans for the fund**.

The Welsh Government **will have overall responsibility for managing the LGF** in Wales, and will be accountable to the UK Government and Senedd for its performance in managing the fund. Funding will be released annually by the UK Government, subject to an yearly review process. This will be a change in approach from the current arrangements **under the SPF**, where the UK Government has worked directly with local authorities, bypassing the Welsh Government.

The UK Government is **providing £547 million to Wales** for the LGF between 2026-

27 and 2028-29, which works out at around £182 million per year. This is less than was received under both the SPF and EU Structural Funds.

The UK Government **has developed three broad themes for the fund** – support for business; skills and employment support for growth; and enabling local growth infrastructure. The Welsh Government’s **objective for the LGF** is to “support productivity growth and tackle issues leading to economic inequalities across Wales”. In relation to skills, **the Welsh Government’s consultation** sets out its intention to reverse the increase in economic inactivity seen since 2019, and respond to the challenge of long-term sickness. It also intends to work alongside, and build on, existing support from Job Centre Plus and Welsh Government initiatives such as the Young Person’s Guarantee and the Employability Support Programme that will come in from 2027.

The Welsh Government **has proposed that** the LGF has Wales-wide, regional and local elements. It intends to work with partners to identify a number of ‘national interventions’, and will assess the business cases submitted by these, which will be planned and delivered by “the most appropriate organisation”.

The Welsh Government will work with partners with the aim to develop an investment plan for the three years of funding, which it **intends to submit to the UK Government early next year** to enable funding to be transferred to the Welsh Government.

## 5. Youth work

The Fifth Senedd’s Children, Young People and Education Committee published **two reports about Youth Work**, in **2016** and then in **2018**. It heard concerns about the effectiveness of the Welsh Government’s strategy and policies in respect of youth work.

The Welsh Government appointed Keith Towler to chair the Interim Youth Work Board for Wales, and its **final report, ‘Time to deliver for the young people of Wales’**, was published in 2021.

The **Programme for Government 2021 to 2026** included commitments to:

- appoint a Cabinet level minister to develop and take forward the proposals of the Youth Board for Wales; and
- legislate for a new framework for youth services in Wales.



The Welsh Government held a **consultation on ‘Youth work in Wales: delivering for young people’** in 2024, publishing a **summary of responses** in January 2025.

In June 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Education issued a statement setting out the Welsh Government’s proposals for **A national body and statutory framework for youth work**.

However in November 2025, the **former Chair of the Interim Board, Keith Towler wrote** to the current Children, Young People and Education Committee referring to “concern about the direction that work has now taken”. He says:

Firstly, the so called ‘definition’ of youth work is neither a definition or a statement that reflects the aspirations of a sustainable model of youth work delivery as set out in Time to Deliver.

Secondly, the proposal to establish a national body for youth work in Wales is welcomed by the sector but the rather top-down bureaucratic controlling body that seems to be envisaged is at odds with the offer of CWYVS and the WLGA to work with Welsh Government officials to develop a partnership model

And, if there is to be a new framework for youth work with ‘Draft Directions’ and ‘Draft Statutory Guidance’ as outlined in last year’s consultation paper, with little or no amendment, I fear that would be a mistake as the proposals are unrealistic and unworkable.

## 6. Future generations and children’s rights

### **The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act**

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** (the Act) is concerned with improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It aims to put sustainable development at the centre of decision-making.

The Act establishes **seven well-being goals for Wales**, and places a duty on **public bodies**, including the Welsh Government, to set and publish well-being objectives to show how they will achieve the goals.

**Public bodies subject to the Act** must take all reasonable steps towards meeting the objectives they set. The Act also puts in place **five ways of working** (long-term; prevention; integration; collaboration and involvement) that public bodies must act in accordance with to show they have applied the sustainable development principle.

The Act established **Public Services Boards (PSBs)** for each local authority area in Wales. PSBs must publish a local well-being plan, setting out their objectives and how they propose to meet them. PSBs can choose to merge, or be directed to merge, to work on a joint or regional basis. There are currently 13 PSBs.

The June 2021 **Programme for Government** includes the Welsh Government's well-being objectives and was accompanied by a **well-being statement**.

The Act established the role of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales to promote the sustainable development principle, act as a guardian for the interests of future generations, and support public bodies listed in the Act to work towards achieving the well-being goals. The Commissioner holds office for a seven year period. The **current Commissioner, Derek Walker**, began his role on 1 March 2023.

The Commissioner must also publish a **Future Generations Report** containing an assessment of the improvements public bodies should make to achieve the well-being goals a year before each Senedd election and is required to publish an annual report.

The Auditor General is also required to examine each public body at least once in each five year period, and to **report on the implementation of the Act**.

## Post-legislative review of the Act

The Equality and Social Justice Committee is **undertaking post-legislative scrutiny of the Act**.

The Committee has not yet reported. There has been recognition in evidence that the nature of the Act means it requires time to embed, and some evidence suggesting it has had a positive impact to date. However, the Committee has also heard evidence suggesting that progress is slow.

The **Future Generations Commissioner's written evidence** said:

While progress is being made, we are not on track to achieve our seven well-being goals...However, as the Auditor General has said too... there is growing awareness and understanding of the WFG Act, and as time goes on, public bodies are getting better at implementing it. Nonetheless, more action is needed.

Similarly, the Auditor General's **latest statutory report** suggests that while the Act "is changing conversations, influencing longer-term planning, and impacting day-to-day decision-making and working practices across Welsh public services" there are

also examples where “public bodies have given little or no explicit consideration to the Act...[and] the Act is not driving the system-wide change that was intended”.

**Written evidence from the Welsh Government** sets out its view on progress.

## Progress reporting: implications for young people

### Progress towards meeting national indicators

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The Act also requires the Welsh Ministers to **set national indicators** to measure progress towards achieving the well-being goals.

The Welsh Government publishes the Well-being of Wales report annually to track progress on the national indicators. The **2025 Well-being of Wales report** was published in October. It presents a mixed picture for children and young people.

While the proportion of 16 to 24 year olds in employment, education or training has fluctuated between 2015 and 2023, the report says “provisional estimates show that 86.4% of 16 to 24 year olds were in education, employment or training in 2023, up from 83.9% in 2015”. It also notes, “among young people, the percentage with two or more healthy behaviours has improved since 2017”.

However, it also notes:

- “children are consistently the age group most likely to be in relative income poverty in Wales”, with 31% of children in relative income poverty in the three-year period to March 2024, the same as the three year period to March 2014;
- “for young people, average mental wellbeing scores declined [...] across the time series, with the gap between low and high family affluence widening”; and
- “children’s participation in the arts has declined and is now at or below levels seen a decade ago”.

### The Future Generations Commissioner’s assessment of progress

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The Commissioner published the **Future Generations Report 2025** in April, on the tenth anniversary of the Act becoming law.

In relation to the national indicators, the report noted “some indicators have improved”, including the overall employment rate and participation in sport, but:

Many indicators have worsened, including life expectancy in Wales, reflecting rising poverty, inequality, and preventable illnesses.

In terms of implementation and young people, the report noted:

Children and young people remain underrepresented in decision-making. Given the low levels of engagement among young people, ensuring meaningful participation must be at the heart of efforts to improve well-being.

It also noted that “young people from working-class backgrounds in Wales are the least likely to be in employment in the UK”, and:

Young people from working-class backgrounds in Wales have poorer education and labour market outcomes compared to the rest of the UK. Only 56% achieve A-level equivalent qualifications, lagging behind the 60-65% seen in other UK nations.

Employment rates for young people from working-class backgrounds in Wales are also the lowest in the UK, with just 71% in employment, compared to 74-78% in other nations.

Fewer apprenticeships are taken up by young people in England and Wales compared to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Only 20% of apprenticeships in England and Wales are started by 16-18-year-olds, whereas in Scotland the figure is 37%, and in Northern Ireland, it is 52%.

Welsh boys have the lowest levels of participation in higher education across the UK.

## The Children's Commissioner

Rocio Cifuentes began her seven year tenure as Children's Commissioner in April 2022 and recently published her **third Annual Report** for the year ending March 2025.

The principal aim of her role is to safeguard and promote the rights and welfare of children. There are a wide range of rights set out in the **United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** including protection, health, family, education, culture and leisure. The **Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011** places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have ‘due regard’ to the UNCRC in everything they do. The Commissioner has a set of **legal powers**, including to review the impact on children of the Welsh Government's and other public bodies' exercise of functions, make representations to the Welsh Government and to assist children in certain circumstances.

Pages 18-21 of the Commissioner's Annual report provide some breakdown of the 659 individual cases of advice and assistance in the year 2024-25. **50%** of these cases were about **Education and Additional Learning Needs**. These included issues relating to school complaints, access to appropriate support, bullying, placement decisions, and challenges around exclusions and transport. They also

included concerns about assessments, placement disputes, provision concerns, and lack of access to appropriate support.

The Commissioner's report made **four recommendations relating to education**: two on School Complaints and two on Additional Learning Needs. The Commissioner called for a review of school governance which the **Welsh Government accepted in its response on 28 November 2025**. The Welsh Government had already published a **Review of school governing bodies** in October, an issue about which a recommendation was then made in the **Gwynedd Child Practice Review** and accepted by the **Cabinet Secretary for Education** on 4 November 2025, relating to the case of former headteacher Neil Foden.

The Commissioner **told the CYPE Committee on 6 November:**

The role of the governing body, in the case of Gwynedd, was a clear failing, and this is why the review into governing bodies is so important, because governing bodies are fundamentally there to hold headteachers, the school and the leadership of schools to account, and without an effective governing body, there is—. Well, that's what we saw—a very powerful individual who is completely unfettered by any check or balance.

The review will be undertaken by Welsh Government officials and is **expected to take six to nine months** "with the aim of providing a report for the Welsh Ministers by summer 2026".