

# Welsh Government delivery in the Sixth Senedd: Research Briefing

March 2026



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# Welsh Government delivery in the Sixth Senedd: Research Briefing

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**Overview:**

The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister is holding a session on 13 March 2026 with the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, to scrutinise the Welsh Government's delivery of its Programme for Government during this Senedd term.

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



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## 1. Introduction

On **13 March 2026**, the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister is scrutinising the First Minister, Eluned Morgan MS, on the Welsh Government's delivery of its **Programme for Government 2021-2026** over the course of this Sixth Senedd term.

This follows a previous session the Committee held in **July 2025** with the First Minister on Welsh Government delivery, as she approached the end of her first year in office. That session focused on the four priorities she set out shortly after becoming First Minister.

The session on 13 March focuses on the Programme for Government and the whole of this Senedd. This briefing sets out relevant background information and some of the key issues the Committee may cover.

## 2. Programme for Government

The Welsh Government set out its **Programme for Government for 2021-26** in June 2021, updating it in December 2021 to reflect the (now ended) **Co-operation Agreement** with Plaid Cymru. The Programme for Government (PfG) is structured around 10 '**well-being objectives**', each covering a range of policy areas. Each well-being objective has a number of **commitments** which are the responsibility of the whole of the Welsh Government Cabinet due to their cross-portfolio nature. The PfG also includes a number of **commitments** resting with **individual Cabinet Secretaries / Ministers**.

The 10 well-being objectives (in the order presented in this briefing) are to:

- Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare.
- Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people.
- Make our cities, towns and villages even better places in which to live and work.
- Build an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and the industries and services of the future.
- Build a stronger, greener economy as we make maximum progress towards decarbonisation.
- Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do.
- Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms.

- Push towards a million Welsh speakers, and enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive.
- Continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise.
- Lead Wales in a national civic conversation about our constitutional future, and give our country the strongest possible presence on the world stage.

## Welsh Government PfG Annual Reports

In this Senedd term, the Welsh Government has published an annual report each July setting out its perspective of progress against the Programme for Government. This includes an annex giving an update, as of 31 March that year, on each of the 115 commitments that sit beneath the 10 well-being objectives.

The **2025 Annual Report** was published on 11 July 2025. The First Minister has said this will be the last such document published in this Senedd term. While the First Minister has not provided a specific paper to inform this session, her **letter of 19 February** provided a bulleted summary of her perspective on some key achievements and developments since the last report in July 2025. These bullets cover the following seven areas: housing, transport, jobs, health, culture, farming, and free school meals.

## Senedd Research PfG series, 2023

In September 2023, Senedd Research published a **series of articles**, using information in the public domain, to summarise the Welsh Government's progress at that time in delivering its Programme for Government.

## The context of this Senedd term

The Programme for Government 2021-26 was published on **15 June 2021**, shortly after the start of this Sixth Senedd term. This was a time when Wales, like the rest of the UK, was emerging from the emergency phases of the COVID-19 pandemic and moving into a period focused on recovery. Wales moved from alert level 4 (the highest alert level of the Welsh Government's **Coronavirus Control Plan**) to **alert level 3 on 3 May 2021** and **alert level 2 on 17 May 2021**.

Wales then moved to **alert level one on 17 July 2021** and **alert level zero on 7 August 2021**. Due to the emerging Omicron variant, there was a move back to **alert level 2 on 26 December 2021** before a return to **alert level zero on 27 January**

**2022.** On 5 May 2023, the **World Health Organisation declared** that COVID-19 no longer constituted a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), meaning countries could start to move from emergency mode to managing COVID as an ongoing health issue alongside other infectious diseases.

The then First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, said in **Plenary on 15 June 2021** that the Programme for Government was “first and foremost, about recovering from the pandemic”, pointing to the health, education and economic recovery that was needed as well as “the other great emergency of our time - the emergency of biodiversity loss and of climate change”.

This Senedd term has also seen **Russia’s war against Ukraine**, considerable **cost of living pressures**, alongside the implications of the **UK’s exit from the European Union**, to note just some cross-cutting issues.

### 3. PfG objective: “Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: ***Is the Welsh Government on track to deliver its vision of a healthier Wales?***

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **Summary** and **detailed annex**

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Establish a new medical school in North Wales.
- Provide treatments which have been delayed by the pandemic.
- Deliver better access to doctors, nurses, dentists and other health professionals.
- Reform primary care, bringing together GP services with pharmacy, therapy, housing, social care, mental health, community and third sector.
- Prioritise investment in mental health.
- Prioritise service redesign to improve prevention, tackle stigma and promote a no wrong door approach to mental health support.
- Roll out child and adolescent mental health services ‘in-reach’ in schools across Wales.

- Introduce an all-Wales framework to roll out social prescribing to tackle isolation.
- Review patient pathway planning and hospice funding.
- Develop an HIV action plan for Wales.
- Introduce an autism statutory code of practice on the delivery of autism services.

## Providing treatments delayed by the pandemic

The 2025 PfG annual report highlights progress in reducing the longest waits for treatment, supported by additional investment and work to redesign planned care pathways. The Welsh Government's 2022 **planned care recovery plan** set targets to eliminate most two-year waits by March 2023, one-year waits by spring 2025, and to ensure 80% of cancer patients start treatment within 62 days by March 2026. A **refreshed recovery plan** in 2025 placed stronger emphasis on national oversight, and allocated an additional £120 million on top of the £170 million annual investment in planned care services, aiming to cut the waiting list by 200,000 pathways, eliminate two-year waits, and restore diagnostic waits to under eight weeks.

As of **December 2025**, just under 741,000 Referral to Treatment (RTT) pathways were waiting for treatment - the lowest since March 2023. Two year waits had fallen to 5,300, a 92.5% reduction from the March 2022 peak, and cancer performance had improved to 60.7%, still some way short of the 80% target. Diagnostics remain under significant pressure, with 137,300 pathways waiting - the highest on record - and over 46,800 waiting longer than the eight week target.

At the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister in **December (paragraphs 188-195)**, the First Minister said the Government must continue prioritising reductions in long waiting lists, while ultimately aiming to shift more resources toward prevention and care closer to home, once the post-pandemic backlog has eased.

## Mental health

The Welsh Government's **Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy** (April 2025) sets out a shift from a predominantly health-led system to one focused on prevention, early intervention, with support delivered across health, social care, and community services. Mental health funding remains ringfenced and is expected to exceed £840 million in 2026-27. Priorities include mainstreaming services such as **NHS 111 Press 2**, and strengthening performance through the **Strategic Programme for Mental Health**.

Despite this, evidence shows persistent system pressures. Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW's) 2025 **report on mental health services** highlights workforce shortages, inconsistent governance, and concerns about the care environment across both inpatient and community services. The **Royal College of Psychiatrists (RCPsych) in Wales** welcomed initiatives such as NHS 111 Press 2 but emphasised the need to strengthen the wider system around it. Stakeholders including RCPsych Wales and HIW, caution that although the Welsh Government's mental health strategy provides a clear direction, successful implementation will require addressing structural challenges such as staffing shortages, estate quality, and ensuring consistent access to psychological and therapeutic interventions.

The **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) in-reach programme** has now been rolled out nationally, although Wales does not yet have consistent data or measures to show how well the programme is working across all health boards.

## Access to health professionals and reforming primary care

### GP services

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The **GP access commitment** introduced in April 2022 requires practices to offer a mix of appointment types and an end to the 8am 'bottleneck'. Following the 2025–26 General Medical Services (GMS) contract agreement, the **Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Jeremy Miles MS, said** further steps would be taken to strengthen the access standards and that he expected improvements from April 2026. The Health and Social Care Committee's recent **inquiry into the future of general practice** found ongoing difficulties in accessing GP care, a workforce under significant strain, and inconsistent implementation of multidisciplinary teams due to infrastructure, digital, and funding limitations.

### Wider medical workforce

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The North Wales Medical School welcomed its first cohort of 80 students in September 2024, with numbers expected to rise to 140 per year by 2029–30. However, **BMA Cymru Wales** and the **Royal College of Physicians** have raised concerns that medical school expansion has not been accompanied by increases in foundation or specialty training posts – creating bottlenecks and contributing to high competition ratios and stalled progression for early career doctors.

## Dentists

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A **[new NHS General Dental Services contract](#)** will come into force in Wales in April 2026. The contract aims to improve access to NHS dental services, replace automatic six-month check-ups with an approach based on individual oral health needs and risk, and introduce a fairer, more transparent payment system for dentists.

## 4. PfG objective: “Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: **[Supporting ‘vulnerable’ people: what is the Welsh Government delivering?](#)**

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **[Summary](#)** and **[detailed annex](#)**

This **[PfG objective](#)** consists of the following commitments:

- Pay care workers the real living wage and working with social partners through the Fair Work Forum consider further steps towards parity of recognition and reward for care workers.
- Increase apprenticeships in care and recruit more Welsh speakers.
- Establish an expert group to advise by April 2022 on the practical steps towards delivering a national care service that is free at the point of need.
- Legislate to further integrate health and social care services.
- Support innovative housing development to meet care needs.
- Fund childcare for more families where parents are in education and training or on the edge of work.
- Deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all 2 year olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision.
- Continue to support our flagship Flying Start programmes.
- Prevent families breaking up by funding advocacy services for parents whose children are at risk of coming into care.
- Provide additional specialist support for children with complex needs who may

be on the edge of care.

- Explore radical reform of current services for children looked after and care leavers.
- Eliminate private profit from the care of children looked after.
- Fund regional residential services for children with complex needs ensuring their needs are met as close to home as possible and in Wales wherever practicable.
- Strengthen public bodies in their role as ‘corporate parent’.

## Background

People are living longer and with chronic conditions. More children have been coming into state care. This is against the backdrop of two significant challenges for social care: the fragile workforce, coupled with the impact of the cost of living both on individuals and on service providers, including local authorities.

## Care experienced children

More than one child in every hundred in Wales is **in care and has the ‘state’ acting as their parent**. Over a **quarter of looked after children** lived in two or more placements in the most recent year. **Fewer than one in five** children in care get five or more GCSEs at grades A\*-C, including Maths and English or Welsh. **Some children are placed** in illegal or unregistered placements, others go missing or are subject to a **‘deprivation of liberty order’** for welfare reasons or risks to their safety. Many care leavers become homeless and the **Petitions Committee** found that around a quarter of care experienced young people have one or more of their own children removed by the state.

The Welsh Government has made and delivered multiple PfG commitments in this policy area. Its legislative commitment to **removing profit from the care of children looked after** was met through provisions in the **Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025** being enacted from April 2026. However, concerns remain about the impact of its implementation with media reports highlighting that a **Council shoulders £2m care bill for just one child** and claiming **Private care providers ‘making hay’ as plan to restrict profits ‘backfires’**.

**Care Inspectorate Wales** says it is “not currently seeing any significant shift in registration trends towards ‘not-for-profit’ provision and that of the 43 new services, 58% were private providers.

The Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee **considered**

**whether these PfG commitments were the right priorities for ‘radical change’.**

when set against a backdrop of rising rates of children in care and the financial pressures on the system. It **concluded** that PfG commitments are not radical enough, and said:

Anybody claiming that the state is doing its corporate parenting job well should consider whether they would be happy for their own child to be cared for by that system.

## Childcare

The original beneficiaries of the **Childcare Offer for Wales** were **working parents** but, **following criticism**, the Welsh Government put in place a PfG commitment to “Fund childcare for more families where parents are in education and training or on the edge of work”. Parents of 3 and 4 year olds enrolled in further or higher education can apply for 30 hours childcare for 48 weeks of the year. The Welsh Government completed this commitment by September 2022.

There is a separate PfG commitment to expand Flying Start free childcare to all 2 year olds. In January 2026, the Welsh Government said that more than 20,000 two year olds will have been offered the free 12.5 hours a week ‘Flying Start childcare’, and **estimate that the offer will be made to 66%** of the eligible population by the end of this Senedd term.

## The social care workforce

Senedd Research’s 2022 article ‘**Social Care: a workforce in crisis?**’ set out the huge challenges facing adult social care. The social care sector continues to experience ongoing pressures and persistent staffing shortages.

The **latest available workforce data** (2024) shows that vacancies have remained stable, with an estimated 5,346 vacancies, and the highest proportion being in adult residential care (34.9% of the total vacancies). Over a quarter (25.9%) of domiciliary care workers are on zero-hours contracts, and casual contracts make up 30.9% of local authority adult residential care contracts.

The **latest Social Care Wales workforce survey** (2024) found that one in five social care employees were aiming to leave the sector within an average of 14 months. Reasons included low pay, a lack of recognition, poor working conditions, and a lack of career development opportunities. 42% of staff were dissatisfied with their pay.

Implementation of the Real Living Wage began in April 2022 and was welcomed by many as a first step. However, stakeholders, including **trade unions** and

care providers, made it clear that this move alone is not enough to address the shortages.

The Welsh Government's Social Care Fair Work Forum was established in September 2020. It published a **progress update in 2023** setting out plans for a voluntary model of collective bargaining aiming to improve terms and conditions, and a voluntary pay and progression framework. The **Health and Social Care Committee stated** at the time that it was not yet persuaded these voluntary measures were adequate to address the severity of the situation.

Since then, the Welsh Government has **established a Social Care Workforce Partnership** as a voluntary form of collective bargaining. It is currently **consulting on the development of a Social Care Negotiating Body** for Wales to set Fair Pay Agreements for the social care workforce, following the UK Employment Rights Act 2025. The Welsh Government has also published the **Social Care Fair Work Forum's voluntary pay and progression framework** (2026), with an **oral statement by the Minister for Children and Social Care** on 24 February setting out recent developments.

The **Forum's 2025 annual progress update** identifies international recruitment challenges as an emerging priority, prompted by UK Government announcements in the Immigration White Paper. Under the changes, overseas workers will no longer be able to apply for social care worker or social care manager roles in the UK.

The forum has called for the Welsh Government to consider urgently a support mechanism for overseas workers who are living in Wales, particularly those who are displaced due to employer licence revocations and therefore have limited time to source new employment.

## A National Care Service

The Welsh Government has met its PfG commitment to establish an expert group to advise on steps towards delivering a National Care Service free at the point of need. The **Co-operation Agreement** added to this, including a commitment to agree an implementation plan by the end of 2023.

The expert group was established in February 2022 and the Welsh Government published the **group's report** in November 2022.

In December 2023, the Welsh Government published its "**Initial Implementation Plan**" for the National Care and Support Service, and in April 2024, **the National**

**Office for Care and Support** was officially launched. Soon after, the Welsh Government launched its **National Commissioning Framework** for care and support services. In 2025, the National Office for Care and Support released **its first annual report**.

Despite these developments, big questions remain about how a National Care Service (free at the point of need) could be funded, and when this might become a reality.

A recent report by the **Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Local Government Information Unit (LGIU)** cites stakeholders' criticism that "although [the Welsh Government's implementation plan for a National Care Service and its National Office for Care and Support] gave the appearance of progress, they have not translated into tangible outcomes".

## 5. PfG objective: "Make our cities, towns and villages even better places in which to live and work"

Senedd Research article, September 2023: ***Cities, towns and villages: things can only get "even better"***

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **Summary** and **detailed annex**

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Build 20,000 new low carbon social homes for rent.
- Establish Unnos, a national construction company, to support councils and social landlords to improve the supply of social and affordable housing.
- Reform housing law and implement the Homelessness Action Group's recommendation to fundamentally reform homelessness services to focus on prevention and rapid rehousing.
- Publish a White Paper to include proposals for a right to adequate housing including fair rents and new approaches to making homes affordable for those on local incomes.
- Take forward actions to cap the number of second homes, bring more homes

into common ownership and licence holiday lets.

- Support cooperative housing, community-led initiatives, and community land trusts.
- Create a timber based industrial strategy that can develop and sustain the high value production and processing of Welsh wood.
- Decarbonise more homes through retrofit, delivering quality jobs, training and innovation using local supply chains.
- Explore where services and contracts can sustainably and affordably be brought back into a strengthened public sector.
- Ensure that each region in Wales has effective and democratically accountable means of developing their future economies.
- Keep regional partnership working under review with local partners.
- Make 20mph the default speed limit in residential areas.
- Ban pavement parking wherever possible.

## Social housing supply

The latest **affordable housing provision statistics** show that 13,399 homes were delivered towards the 20,000 target by March 2025. A total of 3,643 homes were delivered in the 12 months to March 2025, an increase of 12% compared with the number delivered in the previous year and the highest total since data was first recorded in 2007 to 2008.

The Welsh Government forecasts that it will deliver 18,652 homes by April 2026, meaning it will achieve around 93% of the target figure by the end of this Senedd term. Official projections indicate the **20,000 target will be achieved by the end of 2026**, with 20,304 homes forecast to be delivered by December.

The Local Government and Housing Committee is carrying out a **follow-up inquiry** to its 2024 inquiry on social housing supply. As well as scrutinising implementation of its 2024 recommendations, the Committee is assessing progress on implementing the **recommendations of the Affordable Housing Taskforce**, which was established by the Welsh Government shortly before publication of the 2024 report.

On 18 February 2025, **Audit Wales published a blog post** following up **its 2024 work** on the affordable homes target. The blog post warned that the revised projections will still be challenging to meet and highlighted the risk of a drop in delivery early in the Seventh Senedd, which would be consistent with the 26% drop

in delivery that occurred in the first year of the Sixth Senedd.

## Homelessness

As of 30 November 2025, there were 10,865 people in temporary accommodation, a 5.5% reduction in a 12-month period. This includes 2,429 dependent children, a 16% reduction.

The **Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill** passed Stage 4 on 10 February 2026. The Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government Jayne Bryant MS said that the legislative reforms are “**not a quick fix**” and will take time to implement.

**Scrutiny committees heard evidence** that successful implementation will require significantly more resources flowing into homelessness, **housing support**, and social housing supply. But the Welsh Government claims it will **save money long-term**.

## Second homes and holiday lets

In 2026-27, there are 26,174 second homes in Wales for which council tax may be charged. This is an increase of 2,207, or 9.2%, compared with 2025-26 (23,967). Of all chargeable second homes, 20,463, or 78%, are charged a council tax premium of between 50-150%.

One factor behind the increase is likely to be movement of holiday lets between non-domestic rating (NDR) and council tax valuation lists. UK Government statistics found that in 2023-24, **1,240 self-catering holiday homes** were deleted from the NDR list with 950 corresponding insertions in the council tax list.

The Welsh Government introduced the **Development of Tourism and Regulation of Visitor Accommodation Bill** on 3 November 2025, which will create a licensing scheme for certain types of short-term lets. The Bill is currently at Stage 3 of the legislative process.

## Community-led and cooperative housing

The Welsh Government primarily supports community-led housing via funding to **Cwmpas**. On 28 January 2026, the **Cabinet Secretary said** that Cwmpas now has 45 active community-led housing groups, with a **development pipeline of 296 homes**. Of these, five projects are housing co-operatives delivering 42 co-operative homes. Jayne Bryant MS said other sources of potential funding are **Social Housing**

**Grant, Empty Homes Grant**, and the **Perthyn** fund.

The Cabinet Secretary said “we want to grow, but we must be realistic about what growth looks like in Wales and for the community-led sector”. She added that she had accepted the 2024 recommendation from the Local Government and Housing Committee to reconsider establishing a revolving loan fund for community-led housing, and that the Welsh Government was awaiting a proposal and business case from Cwmpas. However she said that given the timing, this was likely to be a decision for the next Government.

## Retrofit

The Welsh Government funds a number of schemes which support the retrofit of homes. The **Optimised RetroFit Programme** (ORP) has delivered **around 31,000 energy efficiency installations** to existing social homes since 2020, supported by over £355 million in funding from the Welsh Government.

Homeowners in Wales can apply for interest-free loans through the **Green Homes Wales** scheme, and the Warm Homes Programme (or Nest) provides **free home energy efficiency improvements** for those on low incomes. Private landlords may be able to get help to improve the energy efficiency of a property through **Leasing Scheme Wales**, provided they agree to lease the property to their local authority for a period.

In April 2023, the Welsh Government committed to developing and implementing a **residential housing decarbonisation route-map for Wales**. However, in November 2025 the Cabinet Secretary said that publication of the route-map would likely be **“a decision for the next Government”**. She said that actions to support retrofit are “strongly influenced by UK Government policies in reserved areas” and that officials would need time to analyse the impact of the UK Government’s delayed **Warm Homes Plan**, and any implications for consequential funding.

## Transport

Wales **introduced a default 20mph limit on restricted roads** in September 2023. Strong public reaction led to **updated guidance** for local authorities in July 2024, and **a three-stage review launched in April 2024 is still underway**. **TfW’s July 2025 monitoring report** showed average speeds on main 20mph roads fell by 3.8mph and road casualties dropped “by 11.8% in the four quarters after implementation”, **though three years of collision data** are needed for full

evaluation.

The Welsh Government's 2020 **Pavement Parking Task Force report** was followed by **plans to consult and legislate in 2023**, but this was **delayed due to pressures on local authorities**. The Welsh Government **later said** it was working with the UK Government, **which announced** wider-area powers for England in January. **Welsh Government evidence to the Climate Change, Economy and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee** says it supports the UK approach and is discussing its application to Wales.

## Timber strategy

The Welsh Government published its **Timber Industrial Strategy** in July 2025. It aims to sustainably increase and to add value to Welsh-grown timber, and is structured under six priorities. Confor, the representative body for the UK forestry industry, **welcomed the strategy**.

## 6. PfG objective: “Build an economy based on the principles of fair work, sustainability and the industries and services of the future”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: ***Building the economy: Is the Welsh Government delivering on fair work, sustainability and the economy of the future?***

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **Summary** and **detailed annex**

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Deliver the Young Persons Guarantee, giving everyone under 25 the offer of work, education, training, or self-employment.
- Create 125,000 all-age apprenticeships.
- Put social partnership on a statutory footing through the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Bill.
- Use the new network of Disabled People's Employment Champions to help close the gap between disabled people and the rest of the working population.

- Strengthen our Economic Contract.
- Support the Wales TUC proposals for union members to become Green Representatives in the workplace.
- Support the creation of a Community Bank for Wales.
- Develop a Tidal Lagoon Challenge and support ideas that can make Wales a world centre of emerging tidal technologies.
- Enable our town centres to become more agile economically by helping businesses to work co-operatively, increase their digital offer and support local supply chains, including local delivery services.
- Seek a 30% target for working remotely.

## Young Person's Guarantee

The **Young Person's Guarantee** (YPG) is a key commitment to provide everyone aged 16 to 24, living in Wales, with support to gain a place in education or training or help to get into work or self-employment.

Together with the **Youth Engagement and Progression Framework** (YEPF), the Welsh Government considers the YPG to be fundamental in achieving its **national milestones**, “specifically the milestone of at least 90% of 16 to 24 year olds being in education, employment, or training by 2050”. Together the YPG and YEPF are aimed at preventing young people becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET).

The YPG is an umbrella structure and covers a number of support packages, including:

- **Jobs Growth Wales+** aims to help young people aged 16-19 to gain skills, qualifications and experience to get a job or further training.
- **ReAct+** funding is available for people aged 20 or over who have recently been made redundant or are at risk of being made redundant;
- **Big Ideas Wales** helps people under the age of 25 to start their own business;
- **Communities for Work+** provides specialist employment support to young people who are NEET and have a complex barrier to employment or those who are not eligible for other programmes; and
- Further education; apprenticeships and higher education.

## Youth unemployment

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The **youth unemployment rate in Wales** to the year ending September 2025 was 16.3%; this is up 9.5 percentage points on the previous year. The equivalent UK rate was 13.5%; up 1.9 percentage points on the previous year.

In Wales, the youth unemployment rate for males was 18.3%, higher than the rate for females which was 13.8%. The rate for males increased by 11.2 percentage points on the previous year; compared to a 7.5 percentage point increase for females.

## Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)

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The **proportion of young people aged 16-24 in Wales who were NEET** was 17% in the year ending September 2025; an increase of 6.2 percentage points over the previous year.

## Apprenticeships

A key Welsh Government commitment under the **Programme for Government** was to create 125,000 all-age apprenticeships this Senedd term.

However, in June 2024, during scrutiny with this Committee, the then **Minister for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS**, agreed there had been a reduction in the target to 100,000 apprenticeship starts this term.

Medr's **most recently published data** shows that as of 19 February 2026, there were 92,800 apprenticeship starts as part of the "more rigorous measure" towards the Welsh Government's target.

The Welsh Government has been using this 'more rigorous measure' throughout this Senedd and the previous one. This data takes into account an 8 week period after an apprentice is recorded as starting a course, therefore excluding apprentices who may withdraw or move courses within those first 8 weeks.

**Medr says** that "including the starts which are not counted as part of the more rigorous target measure, there were 101,760 apprenticeship starts" as of 19 February 2026.

On 9 February, the **First Minister announced** that the Welsh Government has achieved "its target of having delivered 100,000 apprenticeships". On 10 February, the **Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, Jack Sargeant MS, made a statement in Plenary** for apprenticeship week in which he said: "we will exceed our

commitment to create 100,000 apprenticeship opportunities this Senedd term”.

However, using the more rigorous target measure for apprenticeship starts, which has been the standard thus far, the Welsh Government’s 100,000 target has not been reached, with the latest data showing 92,800 starts.

Medr intends to provide monthly updates on progress towards the Welsh Government’s target with the next one being published on 26 March.

## Recent Committee scrutiny

There was some discussion of youth unemployment, NEET rates and apprenticeships in the Committee’s themed session on ‘Education, young people and future generations’ on **12 December 2025 (see paragraphs 125 to 152)**.

On 25 February 2026, the **Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs (ETRA) Committee questioned the Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership** on meeting the apprenticeship target (from paragraph 177). The Minister said:

...there are two ways in which Medr published their data: their long-standing way of doing that, and their way of releasing management information, which is real-time data. And I think it’s really important that we do use that real-time data there, and that’s what they’ve published and that’s what we’ve made the announcement on.

## 7. PfG objective: “Build a stronger, greener economy as we make maximum progress towards decarbonisation”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: ***Decarbonising Wales’ economy: a spotlight on transport and agriculture***

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **Summary** and **detailed annex**

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Launch a new 10-year Wales Infrastructure Investment Plan for zero-carbon economy.
- Deliver the Digital Strategy for Wales and upgrade our digital and

communications infrastructure.

- Create a modern legislative basis for transport in Wales.
- Lift the ban on local authorities setting up new municipal bus companies.
- Legislate to modernise the taxi and private vehicle sector and address the problems of cross-bordering.
- Implement our new Wales Transport Strategy.
- Build on the success of our concessionary travel scheme for older people and look at how fair fares can encourage integrated travel.
- Work towards our new target of 45% of journeys by sustainable modes by 2040, setting more stretching goals where possible.
- Take forward the Burns Commission report for Newport.
- Develop a new major routes fund to improve the attractiveness and biodiversity of areas alongside major transport routes in Wales.
- Create a new system of farm support that will maximise the protective power of nature through farming, recognising the particular needs of family farms in Wales and acknowledging ecologically sustainable local food production.
- Introduce a transition period to the new farm support scheme, including continuing stability payments, beyond the current Senedd term.

## Transport commitments

The 2021 **Wales Transport Strategy** outlines how Wales' transport system will develop over the next 20 years, supported by a **monitoring framework** covering 33 measures. In February, **the Cabinet Secretary for Transport and North Wales, Ken Skates MS, reported** to the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee (CCEI) Committee that 17 measures have improved since 2021, ten show no change or lack sufficient data, and six have declined.

On the target for 45% of journeys to use sustainable transport by 2040, the Cabinet Secretary noted early positive shifts.

The **Bus Services (Wales) Act 2026**, which enables new municipal bus companies and introduces bus franchising, received Royal Assent on 2 February. Transport for Wales (TfW) is working to implement the Act, and, with the Welsh Government, has **published a road map** outlining key delivery stages.

Legislation to modernise the taxi and private hire sector was removed from the legislative programme in May 2024. In July, **the then First Minister Vaughan**

**Gething MS** pledged to consult on a draft Bill, but this has not been published.

A **£1 bus fare** for 5 to 21 year olds was introduced in 2025 as a 12-month pilot. The Welsh Government **told the CCEI Committee** in February that over two million journeys have been made and that the scheme will be evaluated to inform future decisions. Wider work on fares and ticketing includes **'tap and go' ticketing** on the Core Valley Lines, which is due to be extended to north east Wales. However, **TfW says** it is still some way from levelling rail fares across the network.

TfW has created a **Burns Delivery Unit** to accelerate implementation of Lord Burns' 58 recommendations on alternatives to the M4 relief road. In February, the **UK Government announced** its support for a **Welsh rail infrastructure project pipeline**, published by TfW. In doing so it confirmed that 2025 Spending Review funding will support rail enhancements proposed by Burns.

The **First Minister's response** to a letter the Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister sent following its session in December covered several transport matters, including budget provision to deliver the Bus Services (Wales) Act 2026 and UK Government funding for rail projects.

## Environment and farm support

The Welsh Government published **Llwybr Newydd i Natur - the Nature Recovery Action Plan for our Strategic Road Network** in October 2023. All priorities included in this plan were stated as due to be completed by 2025, or described as 'on-going'.

The **Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)**, based on statutory **Sustainable Land Management objectives**, launched in January 2026. A **transition period** is planned up until 2029, and **stability payments** will be available. Stakeholders argue that the ambition of the SFS will only be achieved by adequate and multi-annual funding, with **farmers** and **environmentalists** calling for a significant uplift. The unions highlight that farm support has not increased with inflation for over a decade, and say that the SFS puts extra demands on farmers. Environmentalists argue given agriculture covers nearly 90% of Wales, the scheme has a significant role to play in tackling the climate and nature emergencies.

## 8. PfG objective: “Embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: [\*\*\*Tackling the nature and climate emergencies: Is more progress needed to achieve government commitments?\*\*\*](#)

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: [\*\*Summary\*\*](#) and [\*\*detailed annex\*\*](#)

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Commission independent advice that will examine potential pathways to net zero by 2035.
- Pursue devolution of powers needed to help reach net zero, including management of the Crown Estate in Wales.
- Work towards the establishment of an Environmental Governance Body, a statutory duty and targets to protect and restore biodiversity.
- Legislate to abolish the use of more commonly littered, single use plastics.
- Introduce an extended producer responsibility scheme to incentivise waste reduction by businesses.
- Create a National Forest to extend from the North of Wales to the South.
- Harness the economic, cultural, and recreational potential of the National Forest as part of progress towards a sustainable timber industry.
- Develop a Wales Community Food Strategy to encourage the production and supply of locally-sourced food in Wales.
- Introduce legislation to deal with the legacy of centuries of mining and ensure coal tip safety; strengthening local authority powers to protect the public and the environment.
- Introduce a Clean Air Act for Wales, consistent with World Health Organisation guidance and extend the provision of air quality monitoring.
- Designate a new National Park to cover the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley.
- Support 80 re-use and repair hubs in town centres.

- Uphold our policy of opposing the extraction of fossil fuels in Wales, both on land and in Welsh waters, using the powers available to us.
- Expand arrangements to create or significantly enhance green spaces.

## Background

The Welsh Government **declared a climate emergency** in 2019 and the Senedd **declared a nature emergency** in 2021.

The Sixth Senedd has passed four pieces of environmental legislation, addressing:

- **single-use plastics;**
- **air quality and soundscapes;**
- **disused mine and quarry tip remediation;** and
- **environmental governance and biodiversity.**

The Welsh Government also commissioned **advice on net zero 2035**, advanced a **National Forest for Wales**, and **funded reuse and repair hubs**.

However, its commitments on the Crown Estate, circular economy, and a new National Park encountered issues.

## Crown Estate devolution

While the Welsh Government is **on track to meet its decarbonisation targets**, it has not gained any powers related to **the Crown Estate**.

The Crown Estate is a collection of independently managed assets and holdings owned by the monarch. It includes the seabed out to 12 nautical miles and around 50,000 acres of Welsh common land. The Estate's revenue surpluses are given to the UK Treasury.

The Estate holds rights to offshore energy on the continental shelf, which is significant given the **expected expansion of Welsh offshore wind and tidal energy** over coming decades. Last year, the **Crown Estate awarded leases** for three floating offshore wind (FLOW) developments in the Celtic Sea.

The Crown Estate's Scottish holdings **were devolved in 2019**. The Welsh Government **supports Crown Estate devolution**, and **established a panel** in December 2025 "to consider how best to devolve the Crown Estate to Wales". However, the UK Government **does not support its devolution**, citing a "...risk of market fragmentation, undermining or potentially destroying developer confidence

in FLOW”.

## Single-use plastics and the Deposit Return Scheme

The **Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023** restricts the sale of a number of commonly littered single-use plastic items. **Phase 1 of the ban**, covering most products in the Act, was introduced in 2023.

Phase 2 was due to come in by spring 2026 (end of this Senedd term) to ban plastic single-use carrier bags, polystyrene lids for cups and takeaway food containers, and oxo-degradable plastic products – items not included in the original list of **agreed exclusions** to the **UK Internal Market Act 2020** (UKIMA) ‘**market access principles**’

Welsh Ministers **previously said exclusions to UKIMA** were not necessary for Senedd legislation to be effective, however **the Counsel General later** conceded “the Act may have an impact”. As a result, Phase 2 will **no longer be brought forward** by the end of term as it’s “no longer viable to agree and enact an exclusion under UKIMA in time”.

Similarly, UKIMA exclusion negotiations have also impacted the delivery of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS). While, **after much negotiation** and almost a decade since first proposed, a **DRS will be introduced in October 2027**, it will not deliver the full ‘reuse’ ambition, which will require further exclusions.

## National Park designation

On 11 February the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, told the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee (CCEI) that the final decision on establishing a new National Park in north-east Wales – Glyndŵr National Park – would **fall to the next government**.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) led the National Park designation programme which included evidence gathering, assessment, a **2024 public consultation** and a **2025 statutory consultation**. Then, on 12 January 2026, the NRW Board agreed to make the **Glyndŵr National Park Designation Order**, for the Welsh Government to consider.

During the statutory consultation, **none of the local authorities** affected by the proposals supported the designation – Powys, Gwynedd, Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire.

A **Public Notice period** for the Designation Order ran from 16 January to 15 February 2026. NRW will now submit all information to the Welsh Government, which will agree the next steps. An objection from a local authority during the Public Notice period **triggers a local inquiry**.

## 9. PfG objective: “Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: ***Celebrating diversity and eliminating inequality: rhetoric or reality?***

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **Summary** and **detailed annex**

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Implement and fund the commitments made in our Race Equality Action Plan.
- Explore legislation to address pay gaps based on gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, and other forms of discrimination.
- Ensure public bodies and those receiving public funding address pay disparities.
- Pilot an approach to the Basic Income.
- Ensure the history and culture of our Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic communities are properly represented by investing further in our cultural sector and museum network.
- Make our Welsh public transport system more accessible to disabled people.
- Continue our strong partnership with voluntary organisations across the range of our responsibilities.
- Implement targets around Gender Budgeting.
- Strengthen the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy to include a focus on violence against women in the street and workplace as well as the home.

### Background

Despite the development of action plans to improve the lives of specific groups, inequality remains a persistent challenge in Wales, with rising social tensions and

continued disparities across areas such as pay, workplace culture, and access to services. There are **9 specific commitments** and 18 **Ministerial commitments** beneath this objective.

## Celebrating diversity

The **Welsh Government has funded** over 80 organisations between 2022 and 2025, a further 9 projects in the current financial year **and intends to** fund a further 40 organisations to “nurture creativity, promote inclusion and enrich cultural vibrancy at grassroots level”. An **evaluation of the funding programme** found that while it had made “meaningful progress” towards its anti-racist aims, “longer-term change will require continued support and capacity-building.

In 2024-25 **58% of people surveyed said they felt a sense of community** within their local area, compared to 64% in 2021-22. **In the year ending March 2025 6,213** hate crimes were reported in Wales, 3,911 of which were racially motivated. The **Equality and Social Justice Committee** has expressed concerns around social cohesion and a rise in community tensions and called on the Welsh Government to take urgent and coordinated action. The Welsh Government accepted the Committee’s recommendations, including to set up an **Expert Group on Social Cohesion**.

## Pay gaps

The unequal economic position of women is a key driver of gender inequality in Wales. In February 2026 **the TUC reported** that the gender pay gap in Wales stands at 9.7%, which it says means women have to ‘work 35 days for free’ each year.

As a result of the UK **Employment Rights Act 2025** employers will need to create action plans around gender pay gaps. These will be voluntary from 6 April 2026 and mandatory sometime in 2027. The TUC have welcomed the Act, but says the action plans must be more ambitious and robust to make a real difference.

**Estimates of the median hourly pay and pay difference** between hourly earnings of employees in Wales by disability status and by ethnicity demonstrates the **volatility of pay gaps**, making it difficult to assess long-term trends. In 2025 the **Wellbeing of Wales report** reported that the **pay gap for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background employees** compared to white employees decreased from 13.8% less per hour in 2023 to 3.6% less per hour in 2024. **Race Equality First** have called on the Welsh Government to ensure the recording of ethnicity pay gap data is mandatory across the public sector in Wales and to encourage similar action

in the private and voluntary sectors. It also wants to see organisations publish data on pay, progression and hiring by ethnicity and migration status.

The pay gap **between disabled and non-disabled people in Wales** has decreased from 12.2% in 2023 to 7.8% in 2024. Giving evidence to the Equality and Social Justice Committee in 2024, the **Equality and Human Rights Commission said** “the pay differences duty in the Welsh regulations could be easily amended to include monitoring of disability pay gaps”.

Since the publication of the PfG the UK Government has taken steps to take forward an Equality (Race and Disability) Bill which could require large employers (those employing 250 or more employees) to report on their ethnicity and disability pay gap. In March 2025 it published a consultation on the **proposed measures in the Bill** which included questions on the geographical scope of the Bill.

On 3 February 2026 the UK Government provided an **update on the progress of the Bill** stating that it will publish the consultation response and share next steps “in due course”. In January 2026 the Welsh Government said it **was engaging with the UK Government** on the proposed Equality (Race and Disability) Bill.

## Gender budgeting

In this Senedd the Welsh Government has introduced **three gender budgeting pilot schemes** and has said these “**have laid the groundwork for a more systematic approach**”. However, the **Wales Women’s Budget Group** said decisions around the 2026-27 budget failed to acknowledge the issues facing women, exposing the “urgent need to roll out gender budgeting” across Welsh Government”. Both the **Equality and Social Justice Committee and Finance Committee** have called for further action to embed gender budgeting across the Welsh Government.

## 10. PfG objective: “Push forward towards a million Welsh speakers, and enable our tourism, sports and arts industries to thrive”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: [\*Welsh language, tourism, sports and arts: thriving or surviving?\*](#)

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: [Summary](#) and [detailed annex](#)

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Establish a National Music Service.
- Introduce legislation permitting local authorities to raise a tourism levy.
- Legislate to strengthen and increase our Welsh language education provision.
- Streamline the process for implementing Welsh Language standards.
- Implement Welsh Language standards on public transport; regulators in the health sector; newly established public bodies and water companies; and begin work on implementing standards on housing associations.
- Support an increase in Welsh-speaking spaces, including workplaces.
- Create a Welsh Language Communities Housing Plan.
- Explore the creation of a shadow Broadcasting and Communications Authority for Wales and provide additional investment to develop enterprises to improve Welsh-based media and journalism.
- Pursue the case for devolution of broadcasting and communication powers.
- Engage with the arts, culture and heritage sectors to develop a new culture strategy.
- Invest in our theatres and museums, including committing to Theatr Clwyd, establishing the Football Museum and the National Contemporary Art Gallery.
- Support the application to identify the slate landscape of North West Wales as a World Heritage Site.
- Develop plans for a Museum of North Wales.
- Promote equal access to sports and support young and talented athletes and grassroots clubs.

## Visitor Levy

The **Visitor Accommodation (Register and Levy) Etc. (Wales) Act 2025** received Royal Assent on 18 September 2025. The Act delivers the PfG commitment and provides local authorities with a discretionary power to charge a visitor levy on overnight stays in visitor accommodation.

## Culture and sport funding

Senedd Research has analysed total government spending in Wales and other European nations, publishing an **article in March 2025**. Updated figures were included in the Culture Committee's **2026-27 Draft Budget report** in December 2025.

The average public expenditure on cultural services in these countries is £223.85 per person. In Wales the figure is £73.27 per person, or 33% of the average of these countries. This placed Wales second from bottom of the group of 25 nations.

The average public expenditure on recreational and sporting services in these countries is £180.24 per person. In Wales the figure is £61.84 per person, or 34% of the average of these countries. As with spending on culture, this placed Wales second from bottom of the group of 25 nations.

In 2025 the **Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee (CCWLSIR) said:**

The culture and sport sectors are brittle and under-resourced, which has led to insufficient access to culture and sport across the nation, undermining attempts to broaden access by our national bodies. This insufficient access is likely to scar Wales's culture and sport output for years to come.

## Culture delivery

Although the Welsh Government says (in its 2025 Annual Report) that it has completed its commitment to develop a culture strategy and to establish the National Contemporary Art Gallery, the CCWLSIR Committee has criticised the lack of ambition in the delivery of these commitments. The **proposed "Museum of the North" was not taken forward** after being **allocated £500,000 for a feasibility study**.

The Welsh Government's **'Priorities for Culture'** contain broad statements of intent (e.g. "Culture is inclusive, accessible and diverse") rather than tangible commitments

of what the Welsh Government will do. The **CCWLSIR Committee said:**

It contains no analysis of the challenges facing the sector, nor a meaningful programme for tackling them.

Capital costs of the National Contemporary Art Gallery were “**about a quarter**” of the projected original £35 million, reflecting what **the Welsh Government calls** a “lean operating model”. The Welsh Government has not provided plans for future revenue funding of its project, with the **Minister for Culture, Skills and Social Partnership, Jack Sargeant MS, saying** he hopes it will be “self-sustaining”. This is despite the project’s key partners **all saying that ongoing revenue funding is needed**.

## Welsh language legislation

The **Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025** was a key Welsh Government pledge to drive forward progress on its Cymraeg 2050 strategy of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

The Act strengthens the framework around Welsh language education planning with an aim to improve the linguistic outcomes of pupils. A key element to achieving this is stipulations of minimum amounts of Welsh language education that will need to be provided by each maintained school in Wales. For example, schools categorised as a ‘Primarily English Language, partly Welsh school’ will need to provide a minimum of 10% of school session time in Welsh. Dual Language schools will be required to deliver a minimum of 50%, and Primarily Welsh Language schools a minimum of 80%.

Implementing significant parts of the Act will be the responsibility of the next Welsh Government.

## Welsh Language Standards

At present, over 130 organisations are subject to the Welsh language standards, but there are many that are yet to be brought within the standards regime. During this Senedd term, the Welsh Government has introduced Welsh Language Standards Regulations for regulators in the health sector, water and sewerage companies and most recently, **housing associations (Registered Social Landlords)**.

However, despite the PfG commitment to introduce Welsh Language Standards on public transport providers, this will not be fulfilled in this Senedd. The **Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language, Mark Drakeford MS, said in**

**September** that the intention is to:

bring public transport into the standards system, but we want to do it in a way that deals with the changes in this area. The work will be done during the term of this Senedd, into the next Senedd, so that the next Senedd will be in a position to align the introduction of standards and the establishment of Great British Railways and everything else that is changing in the area.

Transport for Wales is required to abide by some Welsh language standards in specific areas by virtue of the duties placed on the Welsh Ministers.

## 11. PfG objective: “Continue our long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: ***Reforming education: the Welsh Government’s mission to improve standards and tackle inequalities***

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: **Summary** and **detailed annex**

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Fund up to 1800 additional tutoring staff in our schools.
- Build on our School Holiday Enrichment Programme.
- Continue to meet the rise in demand for Free School Meals resulting from the pandemic and review the eligibility criteria, extending entitlement as far as resources allow and at least to all primary school children.
- Invest in the learning environment of community schools, co-locating key services, and securing stronger engagement with parents and carers outside traditional hours.
- Explore reform of the school day and the school year.
- Develop a sustainable model for supply teaching that has fair work at its heart.
- Improve the teaching of Welsh history in all its diversity and complexity as a mandatory part of the new curriculum.

- Take the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill through the Senedd.
- Develop a new mission-based national innovation strategy to be implemented across government and by the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research.
- Increase the opportunities for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds to take part in the Seren Network.

## No change to the school year

The Welsh Government has delivered most of the individual commitments under this PfG objective, with a notable exception where changes were not made as a result of the commitment being “Explore reform of the school day and the school year”.

A **consultation** was held between November 2023 and February 2024 proposing to amend school terms so they are of more equal length with more evenly distributed breaks. Proposals included shortening what is currently the longest term (September to December) by taking a week from the summer holiday to provide a fortnight October half term break; and decoupling the Easter school holiday from the Easter weekend to achieve more consistent and equal term lengths either side of the Easter break. Potential changes under future consideration included a longer May half term break which would further reduce the summer holiday to four weeks.

A key part of the **rationale was to “better support the needs of disadvantaged learners and their families”**, addressing a situation where differing experiences outside of school mean some learners fall further behind their peers during the six-week summer break.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education, Lynne Neagle MS, **announced in June 2024** that she had decided not to make any changes to the pattern of the school year within this Senedd term. She pointed to the lack of consensus in **responses to the consultation** and the level of change that teachers and schools were already tasked with implementing. She felt “strongly that we need to remain focused on our existing and ambitious programme of reform over this period”.

This drew **criticism from the former First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS**, who called it an “abandonment of a manifesto commitment made by the Labour Party at the last election”. Pointing to his view about the “learning loss” that occurs during the summer break, he said what he “really regret[ted] is the damage that will be done to the life chances of the children who are at the heart of this policy”.

## Progress on the education PfG objective as a whole

Fundamental to this PfG objective as a whole is **implementing the Curriculum for Wales and Additional Learning Needs (ALN) reforms**, raising **standards** and narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. The Committee for the Scrutiny of the First Minister discussed **these issues** with the First Minister during its **themed session on education in December**. In summary:

- The roll out of the **Curriculum for Wales** will be complete this September when it is extended to Year 11 and the first set of **new qualifications** will be awarded in summer 2027.
- The **ALN system** has been phased in over the period 2021 to 2025 but a **Welsh Government review** found that it is being implemented inconsistently and there is confusion over key principles such as the definition of ALN and what constitutes additional learning provision rather than generally available provision.
- **Estyn's** latest annual report **warns** that “ongoing weaknesses in literacy, teaching quality and leadership, particularly in secondary schools, limit progress for too many learners”. As of the start of March, 26 of 173 (15%) secondary schools are in a **statutory category of causing concern**. (Information provided by Estyn to Senedd Research on request.)
- GCSE results are slightly higher (2025) than before the pandemic (2019) at grades A\*-A although slightly lower at grades A\*-C. The gap between pupils eligible for free schools meals (eFSM) and other pupils has widened such that it is 29 percentage points at GCSE grades A\*-C. A level results have increased and are higher than in England. (See pages 5 to 10 of Senedd Research's **December 2025 briefing**)

## Tertiary education and research

The **Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill was introduced** by the then Minister for Education and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS, in November 2021. On 8 September 2022, the Bill received Royal Assent and became the **Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022**. A **Senedd Research article** summarises the legislative process.

The Act established the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (subsequently named 'Medr'). Medr became operational in August 2024. At this time it replaced the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) which was dissolved.

**Medr** has responsibility for the funding, oversight and regulation of all post-16 education and training. This includes: further education, local authority maintained sixth forms, higher education, apprenticeships, adult community learning, and research and innovation. The Children, Young People and Education Committee **scrutinised Medr** on 15 January 2026.

## 12. PfG objective: “Lead Wales in a national civic conversation about our constitutional future, and give our country the strongest possible presence on the world stage”

Senedd Research article, September 2023: [\*\*\*Wales at home and abroad\*\*\*](#)

Welsh Government PfG Annual Report 2025: [\*\*Summary\*\*](#) and [\*\*detailed annex\*\*](#)

This **PfG objective** consists of the following commitments:

- Establish an independent, standing commission to consider the constitutional future of Wales.
- Introduce legislation to reform the Senedd, based on 80 to 100 Members; a voting system, which is as proportional – or more – than the current one and introduce gender quotas in law.
- Promote and support the work of the UK-wide Constitutional Commission being established by the UK Labour Party.
- Establish a Peace Academy – Academi Heddwch – in Wales.
- Seek to reform council tax to ensure a fairer and more progressive system.
- Reform local government elections to reduce the democratic deficit.
- Put in place a £65 million international learning exchange programme.
- Reinvigorate our twinning relationships across the EU through a Young People’s Twinning Fund.

## Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales

The Welsh Government **established the Independent Commission on the Constitutional Future of Wales Commission** in November 2021. It had two broad objectives:

1. To consider and develop options for fundamental reform of the constitutional structures of the United Kingdom, in which Wales remains an integral part.
2. To consider and develop all progressive principal options to strengthen Welsh democracy and deliver improvements for the people of Wales.

The Commission **published its final report** in January 2024, arguing that the current devolution settlement is “at risk of gradual attrition” without urgent action to secure it. It made ten recommendations in total, which the **Welsh Government welcomed**. The recommendations relate to:

- including communities within democratic processes, drafting a statement of constitutional and governance principles, and robustly reviewing Senedd reform;
- pressing for legislation in the UK Parliament for stronger intergovernmental mechanisms and making the Sewel Convention legally binding except in specific circumstances;
- removing constraints on Welsh Government budget management; and
- devolving further powers, including over broadcasting, energy, the Crown Estate, justice and policing, and rail services and infrastructure.

In line with the Commission’s first recommendation, the Welsh Government established the **Innovating Democracy Advisory Group**. The Group, which is chaired by Dr Anwen Elias, published its work programme in September 2025. The work programme is structured around three core ambitions:

- Empowering Citizens through Democratic Education and Information;
- Strengthening Political Culture for Participation and Deliberation; and
- Laying Foundations for Constitutional Principles.

The **Commission on the UK’s Future published its report** in December 2022.

While making some recommendations relating to Wales (including the devolution of powers over youth justice and probation), the report stated that it was “mindful that the Welsh Government has set up an independent Commission to make recommendations on constitutional issues”. The then First Minister, Mark Drakeford MS, “**powerfully welcomed**” the report.

## Give Wales the strongest possible presence on the world stage

In February 2026, the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee published its report on the Welsh Government's International Strategy. **'Mission Cymru'** introduces twelve new principles for the future of Wales' international relations. The Committee's report calls on future governments to adopt such a 'Mission Cymru' to "guarantee that Wales consistently delivers on its international relations ambitions and realises its potential".

The report was critical of the Welsh Government's approach to international relations. For example, it criticised the First Minister for a lack of attendance at committee scrutiny sessions and for not having attended any Plenary debates on its international relations reports since taking office. While the First Minister provided the Committee with an assessment of delivery of the International Strategy and its action plans, it said that the First Minister's approach meant that "a degree of uncertainty remains on what has and has not been delivered."

While **some witnesses to the inquiry** were confident that Wales' profile on the world stage had been raised in recent years, the Committee found that a lack of metrics, reporting and evaluation meant that this could not be verified.

The Programme for Government's international commitments are not found in one place. Two specific commitments - to retain an office in Brussels and to establish Academi Heddwch - have been delivered. Other important international commitments have not been delivered, such as the **incorporation of two UN Conventions into Welsh law**. There appears to be no information in the public domain to ascertain whether the commitment to reinvigorate twinning relationships across the EU through a Young People's Twinning Fund was taken forward.

