



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

# Renew and reform: supporting learners' wellbeing and progression

Our education COVID-19 recovery plan.

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## Minister's foreword

As Minister for Education and the Welsh Language my most urgent priority is to ensure every child and young person reaches their full potential, whatever their background, needs, or experience of the pandemic. Every decision I make as Minister will be guided by the needs of learners and their wellbeing, a focus on narrowing educational inequalities, and ensuring the best outcomes for all.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus just how important our schools, settings, colleges and universities are for our children and young people. Educational practitioners have risen heroically to the challenges, showing remarkable adaptability, commitment and resilience. I want to thank them for their dedication, innovation and swift response. Learners too have had to adapt, learning and working in different ways and I absolutely want to commend them as well for their willingness to do so, however difficult that has sometimes been.

Nevertheless, the truth is that despite this the pandemic has taken a significant toll, on our children and young people, on the educational profession that supports them, and their families. Many of our children and staff have found it harder to manage their mental health and relationships, and it has shone a light

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on the stubborn inequalities that still exist in parts of our educational system.

We have already acted, both by expanding pre-existing mechanisms of support and also by developing new approaches in schools and colleges to provide bespoke mentoring arrangements for learners to support their wellbeing and their learning. This plan looks ahead but builds on those foundations. It now brings together those interventions and initiatives deployed over the last year that we want to take forward, along with new commitments as we support learners and the education workforce, using the good practice and positive experiences we have seen to date to build confidence, capability and capacity towards curriculum reform.

We will support the profession and give them the space to focus on what they do best – teaching and supporting learners. That means tackling unnecessary bureaucracy, trusting in their professional judgement, and supporting their wellbeing and development through professional learning. I want the whole system to learn from what has worked in the last year, and continue to build capacity to improve.

We will work in partnership with the profession, educational partners, trade unions and other stakeholders to make sure we are aligned to the common priorities set out in this plan and that we move towards them together. We will listen to the voices of our learners, so our children and young people have a say in the policies that affect them most.

This next year will be crucial to making sure we can achieve our high ambitions for learners in Wales. The decisions we take here and now are integral to ensuring everyone is supported to be their best.

This plan sets the direction of travel and begins to chart that course. COVID-19 has not gone away, and as a government we will continue to respond appropriately to the pandemic. We will remain alert to new information and circumstances, and adapt our approach however necessary to ensure the best possible outcomes.

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# The impact of COVID-19

This plan is being published to outline the Welsh Government's response to the impacts of COVID-19 on learners and learning. It aims to enable all learners to make the progress needed to continue their education and thrive.

As we begin to emerge from the pandemic, it is already clear that there have been significant impacts on learners. Some learners, of course, will have had positive experiences such as spending more time with their families, developing their digital skills and becoming more independent in their learning. In responding to the disruption, practitioners and learning providers have adapted, innovated and built stronger relationships with parents/carers and families. Our approach must build on these successes.

However, we also know that for many learners, staff and families, the disruptions of the last year have been incredibly challenging. The key challenges we want to address are as follows.

1. Learners will need support to develop a secure foundation for learning  
We need to enable learners to learn effectively. Their mental health and emotional wellbeing, their relationships and their physical health are all critical enablers of good learning. Similarly, learners need confidence, enjoyment and motivation in educational settings and in learning. All learners, but especially our younger learners, will also need time and space to play and to socialise with one another, to support their wellbeing and help them adjust to the many changes taking place around them. They may also need support in key enabling skills, including oracy, literacy, numeracy, planning, organising and critical thinking.
2. Learners will need support to continue to progress, developing their skills, knowledge and understanding  
We need to support learners to make meaningful progression in their learning. Focusing on progression is forward-looking, emphasising what learners need to make the next steps in their education. This avoids a deficit-based model focused on 'catching up' on everything that has been missed. Appropriate assessment arrangements support this progression, helping to

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identify, capture and reflect on individual learners' progress over time. Learners may face specific barriers to their development or may have lost specific opportunities important to their progression. Likewise, they may have not had access to a broad and balanced curriculum. It will be important to ensure we support their needs in the broadest sense to help them make that meaningful progression.

3. Practitioners will need support for their own wellbeing

Any approach must also recognise the pressures on staff. Over the course of the pandemic, practitioners have had to replan and reprioritise learning and respond to a range of guidance, expectations and operational requirements. The wider educational workforce has supported children and young people in a range of different ways in the last year. Inevitably, for many, this has had an impact on their wellbeing. This has come in addition to pressing 'business as usual' needs and engaging with ongoing educational reform, including preparing for the introduction of the new curriculum.

4. The educational system is already working towards reform

Before COVID-19, the educational system was undergoing significant change and reform, looking towards the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales. The principles and priorities associated with curriculum reform are the same as those underpinning our response to COVID-19. We must ensure that schools and settings do not face competing agendas: this plan in part sets out our line of sight.

Ensuring all learners are supported to make progress in their skills, knowledge and understanding as they develop towards the four purposes, is critical to both renewal and reform. In addition to the preparations before the pandemic, there is much that schools, settings and practitioners have learned and developed over the pandemic that has brought them closer to realising the new curriculum. We will need to ensure that schools and settings can address both aspects together.

We also remain committed to changing the expectations, experiences and outcomes for children and young people with additional learning needs (ALN), and will continue to ensure that the phased implementation of the new ALN system from September 2021 is manageable for practitioners.

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Our pathway will ensure that we build back better towards reform, as well as develop resilience to future COVID-19 challenges.

## Ensuring equity

The evidence suggests that the pandemic has affected some groups of learners more than others. The nature of our support needs to reflect that, recognising and supporting different groups of learners in the appropriate way. In particular:

- vulnerable or disadvantaged learners, and learners with ALN have not necessarily had access to the support they need; some may have faced challenges with distance learning, and some with readjusting to face-to-face learning. We need also to support those learners whose circumstances have changed during the pandemic, who may not have previously fallen into this category
- learners in early years are in a critical window for language, social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. They risk missing key development milestones, which could impact on their emotional wellbeing, communication and learning development. They may have specific challenges in finding a sense of belonging in their schools or settings, or in being away from their families
- learners in post-16 and transition and those moving into post-16 provision will be concerned with progressing to their next steps, as well as their longer-term employability and skills. These learners will have experienced particular pressures and uncertainty, and their confidence will have been affected
- there will also have been specific challenges for Welsh immersion learners in English-speaking households, and learners transitioning from Year 6 to Year 7.

Many learners in all these groups have valued the personalised support they have received from their families and progressed on their own learning pathway. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not allow learners to make the progress they need; our plan recognises that practitioners know what their learners need and are best placed to decide how to support them. In practice, this means ensuring that our support recognises different learners' experiences of the pandemic and subsequent needs – with specific target cohorts – and giving schools and other

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learning providers the flexibility to draw on that support in the way that is best for their learners.

## Our plan

We have committed over £150 million in funding for the 2021 to 2022 financial year, including:

- £35.8 million to continue the bespoke support and mentoring for learners through the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) programme, retaining the 1,800 full-time equivalent staff recruited in the 2020 to 2021 academic year and maintaining the focus on targeting support at the most vulnerable and disadvantaged learners
- over £6 million to offer term-long placements to eligible Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) to gain more classroom experience and confidence as they move into teaching
- £33 million to support all full-time 16 to 19 learners beginning A level or vocational provision at either a sixth form or FE college
- £13 million to support Foundation Phase provision and non-maintained settings in the form of:
  - £10 million to increase funding to support practitioner-to-learner ratios in schools and additional learning support for funded non-maintained settings
  - £3 million to secure learning support to childcare settings not funded to deliver early education
- £6.25 million to support learner wellbeing and progression in schools, and to establish resilience for future COVID-19 outbreaks and longer-term planning
- £200,000 to support learners who plan to progress to university in the next academic year
- £4.85 million to support delivery of a significantly expanded School Holiday Enrichment programme, with an increased emphasis on supporting recovery from the broader impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in areas of social deprivation
- £15 million for educational technology in schools through the Hwb EdTech programme, to further support the transformation of digital infrastructure of

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all maintained schools in Wales

- £5 million to support a range of activities in the ‘summer of fun’ aimed at the health and wellbeing of children and young people (0 to 25), getting them active and socialising
- £23.2 million additional funding for free school meals during the school holidays, bringing funding for FSM for 2021 to 2022 to over £110 million
- £2 million additional funding for the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) – Access scheme
- £9 million that has been made available in the current year to support wellbeing in schools, including fostering closer ties and support between schools and CAMHS services.

This is additional to the investment in the 2020 to 2021 financial year of over £220 million (including investment in digital and mental health support in schools and colleges).

## Building on what’s worked

Our approach will build on and increase funding for the initiatives that we know help to support learners’ wellbeing and progression – including free school meals and the Pupil Development Grant. In addition, we need to build on the bespoke and additional support delivered in the last year through the RRRS programme, which has recruited over 1,800 full-time equivalent staff, increasing capacity to help meet the challenges of the last year.

The RRRS programme has enabled schools to identify the learners in greatest need, and develop support for them in line with the **5 principles** of the programme. This has enabled a range of bespoke support for learners, for example:

- learning coaches to provide coaching and mentoring support to learners who are in, or moving into, post-16 provision in preparing for their exams
- providing additional support for Welsh-medium learners, particularly those in English-speaking communities, including support for key areas like oracy
- recruiting or training staff to provide Emotional Literacy Support Assessment (ELSA) for learners

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- recruiting additional teaching staff to help reduce overall class sizes
- bringing in additional teaching assistants to support learners transitioning between different parts of their primary education journey.

The funding to continue the programme next year will ensure that we continue and build on the vital support learners have already received. This plan makes clear that this additional capacity, capability, and targeted support for learners will now continue to be a core part of our long-term approach to supporting learning, coupled with other initiatives to support learners and practitioners in the coming months and years.

As we evaluate initiatives to support learners, we will be able to adapt them to ensure they are having maximum impact. Evaluation of the RRRS programme is ongoing, and we will monitor the progress of all such initiatives on an ongoing basis.

## **Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards: Case studies**

### **Llanidloes High School**

The programme enabled Llanidloes High School to meet the demands of the curriculum in the remote context, and provide additional teaching and welfare support for learners.

This included opportunities for learning to be delivered from outside the school, including lessons by students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and other universities on specialist areas, including regular feedback for learners.

### **Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera**

The programme enabled Ysgol Gyfun Ystalyfera to build on the work of their wellbeing team, which supports learners' emotional wellbeing and mental health through one-to-one and group sessions.

The funding enabled the schools to invest in a greater number of staff and resources to support learners in the priority areas they identified, including academic, wellbeing, and mental health priorities.

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Further examples of how different schools have used the programme to support learning are available on [Hwb](#).

## Learning and wellbeing for all learners

Engaging with the profession and partners, we will co-develop an integrated package of funding initiatives to support all learners in both their wellbeing and progression in learning. This will ensure coherence between existing policies and new initiatives. We will also aim to ensure practitioners have the time and space to focus on learning and teaching and how we use our collective learning over the pandemic to build an educational system that is fit for the future and resilient to tomorrow's challenges.

Over the next year, we will:

- provide support for a range of key experiences both in and out of school, including through 'summer of fun' initiatives, working with a range of partners to provide creative, active and other types of learning and considering how we can broaden the range of experience learners have in school beyond formal learning
- continue the RRRS programme to support capacity in schools to provide targeted support to learners, retaining and supporting the 1,800 full-time equivalent staff already recruited over the last year. Throughout, we will support leaders in schools to determine the right approach to support the needs of their learners, as this is most likely to address the needs of those most disadvantaged and impacted upon by the pandemic, and those potentially disengaged learners.
- build on our experiences of distance and blended learning, helping the system embed the learning of the last year as we go forward
- take forward our commitment to explore reform to the school day and year, building on evidence from the pandemic and working closely with learners, the profession, parents/carers, employers, and post-16 education to ensure any reforms enable learners to progress to further and higher education. We will focus on how we can continue to support learner and staff wellbeing, narrow educational inequalities and ensure the best outcomes for all

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## Disadvantaged learners and vulnerable learners

The disruptions of COVID-19 are likely to have had their greatest impact on some of our most disadvantaged and vulnerable learners. We will also need to support appropriately those learners who are newly disadvantaged or vulnerable because of the pandemic, including those living in households disproportionately affected by stay-at-home requirements, income loss, disruption to face-to-face learning, closure of community and leisure facilities, and self-isolation. All of these learners will need additional support at different times and, potentially, more targeted early intervention to address negative experiences. In some cases this might vary from the 'tried and tested' methods of supporting our vulnerable and disadvantaged learners – we will innovate to meet the emerging needs. Working with educational providers will be critical here to ensure we are identifying those who are at risk. We are making good progress in this respect, though our work to establish a Whole School Approach (part of a wider Whole System Approach) to emotional and mental wellbeing. This work is at the heart of Renew and Reform and will be a critical aspect of our plans. It will continue to be an important enabler of learners' well-being and learning.

For learners from low-income families, addressing the impacts of COVID-19 on their learning is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty and disadvantage. We will provide focused support for these learners and their families to ensure that the gains made in recent years in addressing the attainment gap are not lost.

The RRRS programme has targeted, and will continue to target, a range of priority groups, including the poorest children and families, learners with special educational needs, learners from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and learners in Welsh-medium schools. Disadvantaged and vulnerable learners have received extra coaching support, personalised learning programmes and additional time and resources for exam year learners.

For learners with ALN, their families and staff who support them, we recognise the particular challenges that COVID-19 has brought. In tackling those challenges, we remain committed to creating a fully inclusive educational system where all learners are given the opportunity to succeed and have access to an education that meets their needs and enables them to participate in, benefit

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from, and enjoy learning.

Looked-after children have often experienced trauma in their lives including abuse, neglect or loss, which can have a debilitating long-term impact. Care-experienced young people overcoming traumatic early life experiences and those who continue to have turbulent home lives often struggle with attachment difficulties and lack of confidence. It is likely that COVID-19 has compounded such issues and we will prioritise exploring the development of an integrated approach to improving their wellbeing and educational outcomes.

We know that learners' wellbeing has been adversely affected because of the pandemic. Time spent away from family and friends, disruption to normal routines, the impact on education and the family in relation to job loss, health concerns, bereavement and loss will all contribute to emotional and mental health concerns that will outlast the physical impact of the pandemic.

Over the next year, we will:

- review the use and impact of the PDG as part of the 2021 to 2022 allocations to support COVID-19 recovery, including the effectiveness of interventions and how the funding is targeted. This will help us to ensure that support also captures those learners who may be newly disadvantaged or vulnerable because of the pandemic
- work closely with PDG regional representatives to identify those areas where funding can have most impact, in particular prioritising additional funding for more deprived schools, and working with local authorities on ensuring more consistent and transparent school funding formulae
- deliver funding worth £10.45 million for our PDG–Access scheme that goes direct to families for the purchase of uniform, sports kit and other extra-curricular activity resources at key points in a learner's education, including transition from primary to secondary school
- make additional funding available to local authorities for free school meal provision during the 2021 to 2022 financial year during school holidays
- as part of the RRRS programme, provide funding targeted at disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including extra coaching support, personalised learning programmes and additional time and resources for exam years
- support schools, colleges, and other learning providers to support learners

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with ALN in response to the pressures arising from COVID-19

- develop a cross-government plan to address attainment and wider educational outcomes in a systematic, joined-up and collaborative way, making the most of available resources and levers. This will be learner-focused, encompassing the whole 'school journey'
- urgently consider professional learning needs of practitioners, in relation to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, including but not limited to trauma and attachment-informed practice
- progress work in relation to our manifesto commitment to community-focused schools, with a focus on how this can support improved attainment, aspirations, wellbeing and educational outcomes for all our learners
- support schools in ALN reforms, recognising the particular difficulties faced by children and young people with additional needs during the pandemic as part of the £20 million package of support for the ALN transformation programme already in place
- continue to progress the whole-school approach to learner wellbeing that will be critical to supporting learners responding to adverse impacts and experiences
- ensure we promote a rights-based, child-centred approach, recognising and reflecting learners' rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- work with our higher education providers to explore how we can support vulnerable learners in higher education

## Learners in early years

The rapid developmental changes that occur in the early years means that young children will have been affected more significantly by the disruptions of the pandemic than others. We will ensure that children have access to high-quality early learning opportunities, supporting the acquisition of key enabling skills and child development opportunities that are essential to their long-term progression and that provide a strong foundation to succeed in education. Relationships are key for younger children and opportunities for meaningful interactions with practitioners and peers are essential. Our initial focus will be in strengthening practitioner-to-child ratios in schools, to enable them to increase support for children, and additional resources in the non-maintained sector, so

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that young learners have quality play-based learning opportunities.

This will support positive relationships and provide practitioners the time and space to support children in their language development, social skills and physical development. Language development will be a high priority, with an emphasis made on oracy. We will work with stakeholders to ensure that practitioners avoid jumping to 'catch-up' interventions for reading and writing for younger learners, and focus on excellent Foundation Phase pedagogy and learning through play.

We will ensure learners have access to play-based learning opportunities to support their wellbeing and development, as well as time and space to play throughout the school day.

We will co-develop initiatives with the profession and partners to support learning and development in maintained and non-maintained settings for all children in their early years (0 to 7). These will focus primarily on provision for children aged 3 to 7, including those in childcare settings not funded to deliver early education, aligned with our work on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), which seeks to develop closer working between education and childcare provision.

Over the next year, we will:

- develop activities specifically aimed at early years as part of the 2021 'summer of fun' to support health and wellbeing, getting them active and socialising
- reinforce Foundation Phase approaches, including a strong focus on play-based learning to support children's enjoyment of learning and their wider social, emotional and cognitive development
- continue to provide targeted support through the Flying Start programme to children aged 0 to 4 living in the most disadvantaged parts of Wales
- continue funding to the Child Development Fund up to September 2021, and review this during the summer
- increase funding to support practitioner-to-learner ratios in schools and educational support for non-maintained settings in 2021 to 2022
- secure high-quality learning support with an increased focus on wellbeing

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and development to childcare settings not funded to deliver education – this is critical to ensure an equitable approach across all early years, regardless of where provision is accessed in 2021 to 2022

- undertake further work to identify which cohorts of early years children might have been most affected and develop approaches to support them, such as disadvantaged children and children from English-speaking homes attending Welsh-medium provision.

## Learners in post-16 and transition

Learners transitioning to and in post-16 education face significant and distinct challenges. All learners studying for qualifications have experienced uncertainty around assessment arrangements, and may have had difficulty progressing to their next stages due to the disruptions to face-to-face learning. Vocational learners in FE settings have had courses significantly disrupted, affecting their ability to complete practical and work-based elements of their qualifications. These issues will have been particularly acute for those learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Disruptions to learning and to social interactions and experiences will also have affected some learners' physical and mental health and wellbeing, as well as the staff that support them.

Over the next year, we will:

- provide additional funding to support learning time in colleges and sixth forms for the 2021 to 2022 financial year, including additional class-based teaching time or one-to-one support for wellbeing or subject-specific support. This will be accompanied by clear guidance containing recommended indicators and principles for school and college leaders to follow in utilising and evaluating the additional funding
- publish by autumn 2021 a more detailed post-16 recovery implementation plan that responds to the available evidence base, and where appropriate, builds on existing measures
- develop a range of interventions to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the wellbeing, learning experiences and outcomes of post-16 learners and on

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the sector as a whole, and, where the evidence supports it, to build on what has already been delivered

- continue to focus on providing the additional support that learners in qualifications years or those transitioning between school, college, higher education or employment need to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to transition to their next steps.
- consider vulnerability, disadvantage and equality in the development of those interventions, helping to address the different impacts on certain groups of learners
- ensure that funding and pedagogical policies support progression post-16, ensuring a quality educational outcome for all learners, providing sufficient support and flexibility for learners to progress in their chosen routes
- build resilience in the post-16 system to better prepare the sector to respond to future threats and challenges
- evaluate the findings of the 'Well Aware' pilot, a model for supporting staff wellbeing, and consider its appropriateness to roll out to all colleges in future years
- continue to develop e-learning resources to support learners in exam and transition years, and add to these further resources for younger learners

## What we want to achieve

Responding to these challenges and in seeking to further our reforms, our aspirations are that:

- irrespective of their particular backgrounds, needs or experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, all learners make progress in their education and grow in confidence to achieve their potential. Learners will be supported to realise the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, progress to their qualifications and next steps, and contribute to a more prosperous, resilient, and equal Wales
- practitioners have the space, time, and skills to focus on providing the best possible learning experiences, and can develop themselves further in line with their professional learning journey
- learning and teaching is supported by a coherent and clear plan from the

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Welsh Government which is responsive to COVID-19 pressures and focused on future strategic improvement, supporting a revitalised, reform-focused and resilient educational system that puts learners' physical and mental health and wellbeing at the heart of its approach.

Success in achieving these aspirations will result in:

- improved wellbeing for learners and staff, including mental, social and physical wellbeing for learners, and improved mental and emotional wellbeing for staff. This should support improvements in a range of long-term health behaviours and outcomes, including moving towards the wellbeing goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- improved educational attainment, as all learners, particularly in target cohorts, feel supported to develop and progress towards the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales, moving towards improved educational standards and attainment and underpinned by high-quality teaching
- greater equity between learners from economically or otherwise disadvantaged families and their peers, helping to close gaps in attainment between different groups of learners and support social mobility. All of our children and young people should receive the help and support they need no matter where they receive their learning and development opportunities
- stakeholder confidence – we want parents/carers to have confidence in their children's education and in how best to support them, and children and young people to be aware of and confident in the support available to them. Wider stakeholders and partners should be clear about the Welsh Government's intentions, their role in supporting learners, how our 'Renew and Reform' programme links with both our future strategy for education and our future plans for COVID-19 resilience.

Alongside this, over the coming weeks, we will set out our plans for:

- supporting practitioners' wellbeing, utilising part of the additional funding to support wellbeing in schools to aid the development of resources supporting practitioner wellbeing. This is additional and complementary to existing funding streams to support professional learning, which will be aligned with this. We will develop and share thinking on how we can create space for practitioners to enable them to respond to ongoing challenges

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- aligning the pathway out of COVID-19 with the pathway towards curriculum reform, using the upcoming National Network for Curriculum Implementation to provide space for practitioners to collaborate on approaches to learning and teaching in the new curriculum. We will update our expectations from the *Curriculum for Wales: the journey to 2022*, to ensure these are realistic in the current context. This will chart the curriculum reform journey to 2022 and beyond, recognising the impact of COVID-19 and its effect on preparations for the new curriculum. We will bring these expectations together with the **COVID-19 learning guidance**, to provide schools with a single, clear set of expectations for learning and teaching as we begin to move away from the pandemic and into curriculum reform

## Working with partners and stakeholders

Ensuring confidence in our partners is critical. While this plan sets out the actions that Welsh Government is taking, educational reform is for us as a sector. We will collaborate and engage with:

- children and young people – we will put in place opportunities for learners to be heard and input into policy, including through the use of representative groups
- wider users and beneficiaries of the Renew and Reform programme such as parents/carers and families, schools, and further and higher education institutions
- Welsh Government teams across education, health and social services, Welsh Language and social justice to ensure a joined-up approach to our COVID-19 response
- educational partners, including the regional consortia, Qualifications Wales, local authorities and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol
- trade unions
- wider educational stakeholders, including the non-maintained umbrella organisations, third sector organisations and relevant Welsh Government sponsored bodies
- Estyn and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), which will have an important role in evaluating progress and capturing emerging practice.

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We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to present challenges and we need to be alert to this. This plan cannot address every single one of the wide-ranging impacts from COVID-19, but will allow us to chart and tread a path towards a more resilient position, building on the positive experiences and changes while addressing the impact of the more pernicious challenges for particular learner cohorts.

This is only the beginning of a long-term approach to supporting learning in the years ahead, supported by wider actions and reforms. We will continue to reflect, develop and update our plan to ensure we respond to emerging challenges and new information.

## Evaluation

We will develop a clear approach to evaluating the success of our interventions and report on this regularly and transparently, including through our evaluations of funding.

We will evaluate initiatives against the success criteria set out in this plan (wellbeing for learners and practitioners, educational progression and attainment, equity, and stakeholder confidence) using a range of different measures, viewpoints and evidence sources to inform this.

Our coordinated approach to evaluation will minimise the burden on practitioners and learning providers and avoid asking for large amounts of additional data and reporting.

Rather than designing new indicators in the immediate term, we will build on existing evaluations, make maximum use of existing data from Wales (and where relevant, the UK and beyond), and use methods that do not rely on wholesale school reporting.

We will build on the information we already gather such as school attendance, staff perspectives and parents' satisfaction, assessing its quality and fitness for purpose in reliably measuring progress. We will also design further research to build and improve on what we already collect, and to gather new information

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around learner progression, health behaviours and community engagement. We will use this to help consider our progress on our wider curriculum and assessment reforms, as set out in the [Curriculum for Wales Implementation Plan](#).

Research and evaluation should enable us to see effects the policies have had on key goals such as reducing the attainment gap and improving learner wellbeing. Through this ongoing evaluation, and as the context in which we are operating evolves, we will not hesitate to develop and alter our initiatives if that is required to ensure we are having the most impact possible.

We will draw on the research and evidence gathered by our partners in Wales, particularly Estyn and QAA's work, to contribute to our evidence on progress and to help build capacity for continuous improvement. We will keep abreast of the evidence emerging across the UK and internationally about the impacts of the pandemic on learning and ways to address these impacts. We will also ensure evidence of best practice, innovations, or issues overcome are shared, to help the system improve further.

To deliver all this, we will be carrying out research and evaluation activities across the short, medium and long term, with our first updates in 2021 to 2022 academic year.

## Short term

Work is already underway to understand systematically the impacts of the pandemic, and to appraise the evidence base to continue to develop and strengthen specific initiatives to address these impacts. This will support the delivery of our Renew and Reform programme.

The aims of this plan were developed in light of emerging evidence about the impacts of the pandemic and we will continue to review this information to ensure the projects and initiatives are targeted at the right people, places and issues. This will involve reviewing a range of evidence sources and publications about the impacts of the pandemic in Wales, as well as extensive engagement with schools and stakeholders.

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This work will involve consideration of how we will define success for the programme as a whole and what sorts of indicators we can draw on to track progress, informed by the 7 wellbeing goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and those set out in our wider educational reform plans.

We will also keep track of specific issues that have arisen due to the pandemic, for example a widening attainment gap, changes to the relationship between schools and their local communities, and impacts on learners' mental wellbeing and physical health.

## Medium term

As initiatives are introduced, we will begin gathering information and feedback about their implementation. We will consider each initiative against its own success criteria. We will also consider early findings from evaluation of initiatives such as our RRRS programme, and make the case for expanding and continuing some initiatives that are having a big impact.

We will also map, monitor and evaluate coverage across the Renew and Reform programme as a whole. We will ensure research activities are not duplicated and that information is shared across the initiatives, contributing to a shared understanding of what we are achieving, and allowing us to make decisions on what is working.

## Long term

Building on this, the long-term evaluation will focus on effectiveness, impact and progression towards wider educational reforms. Research and evaluation will report to a common framework and overarching set of indicators.

We expect the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 goals to be a critical part of this, building on the Curriculum for Wales Implementation Plan. We will develop this framework collaboratively, and set out a plan for publishing robust evaluations based on long-term evidence and research activities.

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## Next steps and timelines

This plan charts a course for the coming months, setting out our priority activities and priority cohorts. These have been developed and discussed with key stakeholders and we will continue to listen to partners and the range of evidence available. We next intend to update on progress and emerging challenges in early autumn 2021, recognising the changeable and uncertain nature of COVID-19.

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