

UPDATE REPORT ON GWE WORK PROGRAMME (AUTUMN TERM 2020)

Background and context

The response to COVID-19 has dramatically changed our lives. In this challenging context, the education system and schooling has been significantly disrupted. On 23rd March, schools were re-purposed to support children of key workers and some vulnerable learners whilst also supporting all learners to stay safe and keep learning at home.

On June 3 the Welsh Government (WG) announced that there would be a phased opening of schools from 29th June, 2020 to give all pupils the opportunity to “check in, catch up and prepare.” Welsh Government published their Learning Guidance [<https://gov.wales/keep-education-safe-guidance-learning-over-summer-term>] to provide advice on learning and teaching taking place in schools and settings for the remainder of the summer term and to support practitioners as they prepare for the autumn term.

On July 9th, the Education Minister confirmed that all pupils would return to school in September, and that schools were required to return to full capacity by September 14th. Welsh Government published further learning guidance [<https://gov.wales/guidance-learning-schools-and-settings-autumn-term-covid-19>] for the autumn term that gave schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning, regardless of the level of operations in response to COVID-19.

During the Autumn Term, the level of disruption to schools varied considerably across the region, with some schools regularly having whole year cohorts self-isolating at home for an extended period, to others that were able to open to all pupils throughout the term.

Work programme

Staff in the Local Authorities and GwE have adapted their work in order to continue to provide effective services and support for all their school communities during the COVID pandemic. During this very difficult period, GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning. The OECD’s transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.

The service in its entirety has re focused several times during the COVID period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. The ability to be flexible and agile and to work effectively together in different teams, often cross sector, has had significant impact on organisational behaviour and external perception. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service. Regular contact with school leaders has been well received and has contributed to Head teachers feeling that they could turn to a professional colleague to share challenging issues and to find solutions to address day-to-day issues. These included operational discussions on opening school safely as well as professional discussions regarding distance/remote and blended learning.

Weekly staff meetings have contributed to a consistency of approach in ensuring common messages to school teachers and leaders. There has been a strong emphasis on modelling appropriate and supportive behaviour throughout the period. This has included very regular contact with headteachers to ensure that they get the appropriate support to operate

effectively and also as a sounding board to support their own well-being. Further support for senior leaders well-being has been provided through a series of workshops and webinars which will support their resilience during this difficult period. GwE staff have also conducted face to face pastoral visits to schools during the autumn term on behalf of the Local Authorities.

GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the lockdown period and in moving forward. GwE have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. It has also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance/remote and blended learning and to provide advice on formative and continuous assessment. It has also strengthened the working relationship between those parties with positive professional exchanges, ensuring that the stakeholders are getting quality advice and resources.

One of the main strengths of work across North Wales has been the consistent messaging from the six local authorities through their political education portfolio holders and directors working with GwE to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff. One such example is the operational group of local authority and regional staff working on and developing risk assessments policy, advice and guidelines, and creating a regional dashboard which is a strong foundation for all schools to be able to reopen with risks being identified and locally managed and supported.

The six local authorities and GwE have taken a collegiate and collective regional approach to supporting schools throughout the COVID pandemic. This was clearly demonstrated in the consistent regional approach in developing a supportive framework to ensure that all regional schools had the right policies in place together with a comprehensive risk assessment in order to create a safe environment to welcome the children back into schools.

The framework included resources to support planning for:

- 1) Health and safety requirements
- 2) Site and facilities arrangements
- 3) Transport
- 4) Staffing arrangements
- 5) Blended teaching and learning
- 6) Inclusion and pupil support
- 7) Key management tasks.

Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster, alliance or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance/remote and blended learning. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.

One noteworthy aspect of the work has also been the bespoke nature of support for teachers and schools. GwE have worked on the strengths of individuals within the team and redeployed them where they have provided the maximum impact in their roles in supporting individual local authorities, schools, clusters, subject and phase networks. This bespoke provision of support based on strong principles of collaboration, exchanging and sharing and developing the best practice is a key learning principle that we will continue to develop in the next stages of evolving the service.

Schools who were causing concern prior to lockdown have had access to clear and targeted support to help them through this difficult period. This has been at several levels including network support, support to senior leadership and middle management in those schools and

support with provision of distance/remote and blended learning. Schools that have found the lockdown and post lockdown period difficult due to staff having to self-isolate have been supported in various ways. This has included modelling of exemplar materials, webinars, shared materials and resources. Also, GwE staff directly leading, directly teaching in schools or providing distance learning to learners.

A lot of time and energy have been put in place to contact international experts and to research international practice to learn and establish the principles of effective distance/remote and blended learning. Discussions with international colleagues including the OECD have also deepened thinking within the organisation. GwE have provided practical support for leaders to enable them to consider their whole school strategic planning of provision for distance/remote and blended learning, refine and evaluate their evolving provision and consider planning for various scenarios where pupils may be in school and / or at home over the coming academic year. This has supported schools to have a better strategic overview of their provision.

GwE is also supporting schools in evaluating the quality of their blended learning and distance/remote learning provision, sharing local examples and case studies of effective provision to reduce variation where it exists. Live streaming is developing well and enhancing the blended learning experience. Schools now realise that COVID will be with them for an extended period and are planning more strategically and effectively.

Self-evaluation and improvement processes have become an intrinsic part of the work of schools. As schools and settings are becoming more confident with the delivery of learning at a distance, so they will be better able to adapt their self-evaluation processes and tools to monitor, evaluate, review and revise if appropriate, the provision.

School leaders acknowledge that one of the greatest challenges to the delivery of blended and distance/remote learning has been and continues to be ensuring that staff and pupils have the necessary skills' set and resources available to them. There has been a rapid pace of upskilling for some staff to move to digital platforms. Schools have undertaken a range of planned professional learning offered by regional consortia around the use of digital technology to support learning. This has also proved to be an opportunity as a greater number of practitioners are now able to confidently use an increasing range of technology to support learning.

Many schools acknowledge that parental engagement has been a key factor in securing effective distance/blended learning. GwE and the Local Authorities have provided a range of guidance to support school in improving parental engagement, including the sharing of good practice.

Many schools also acknowledge that there are ongoing operational challenges that change on a day-to-day basis, where a range of scenarios have to be planned for including cohorts of learners self-isolating or individual / small groups of learners and staff self-isolating. There are many examples of how schools are managing these complex situations well, having clear whole school strategies. GwE and the Local Authorities continue to support schools, using clusters and networks of schools to support each other and share resources and strategies. GwE have also adopted a regional approach to accelerating learning, working on a tri-level approach which includes universal support led by the consortium, targeted support jointly led by the consortia and the local authority, with the acute being the responsibility of the local authority. This work has been developed on an evidence base approach working closely with Bangor University and regional staff to ensure a range of high-quality resources to support physical and emotional wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, these being made available to all learners across, all age range in all schools. The impact of this work will be captured through a regional dashboard which will include all grants made available to schools by Welsh Government during this financial year.

During the autumn term, GwE have provided opportunities for schools to form alliances or to work within developed clusters to address gaps in provision and alternative ways of delivery to meet any future lockdown scenarios. This work is ongoing and will:

- Identify, develop and share blended learning resources within the cluster/alliance and with other regional clusters/alliances;
- Ensure all identified and developed resources are submitted through their Supporting Improvement Adviser to be included on the GwE Support Centre;
- Support schools within the cluster with their provision to meet any future 'lockdown scenarios';
- Prioritise additional support for the secondary sector in preparation for the awarding of examination grades in 2021.

Schools in the GwE region will have a significant collection of resources for each age group.

The GwE Professional Offer for this academic year has been rationalised and concentrates on 5 main areas: Wellbeing, The Reform Journey, Developing the Workforce, Accelerating the Learning and Digital Learning. In addition, GwE will continue to facilitate cluster working to support the development of Curriculum for Wales, ALN Transformation and the Welsh Language.

During the COVID period GwE has continually reflected on the effectiveness of the work. Both internal and external resources have been used to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of the work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure. GwE is currently working with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop a range of think pieces to support schools in implementing the new curriculum.

The Estyn thematic report '*Local authority and regional consortia support for school and PRUs in response to COVID-19*' (January 2021) concluded that '*school leaders in north Wales are most satisfied with the support they have received from their regional consortium.*'

The report goes on to state that:

*'A majority of leaders agreed that GwE had provided effective support and guidance to support learning in their school or PRU' and that '*a majority of leaders also agreed that GwE had provided useful information on the differences between, and approaches to, distance and blended learning.*'*

Main outcomes and impact of the work

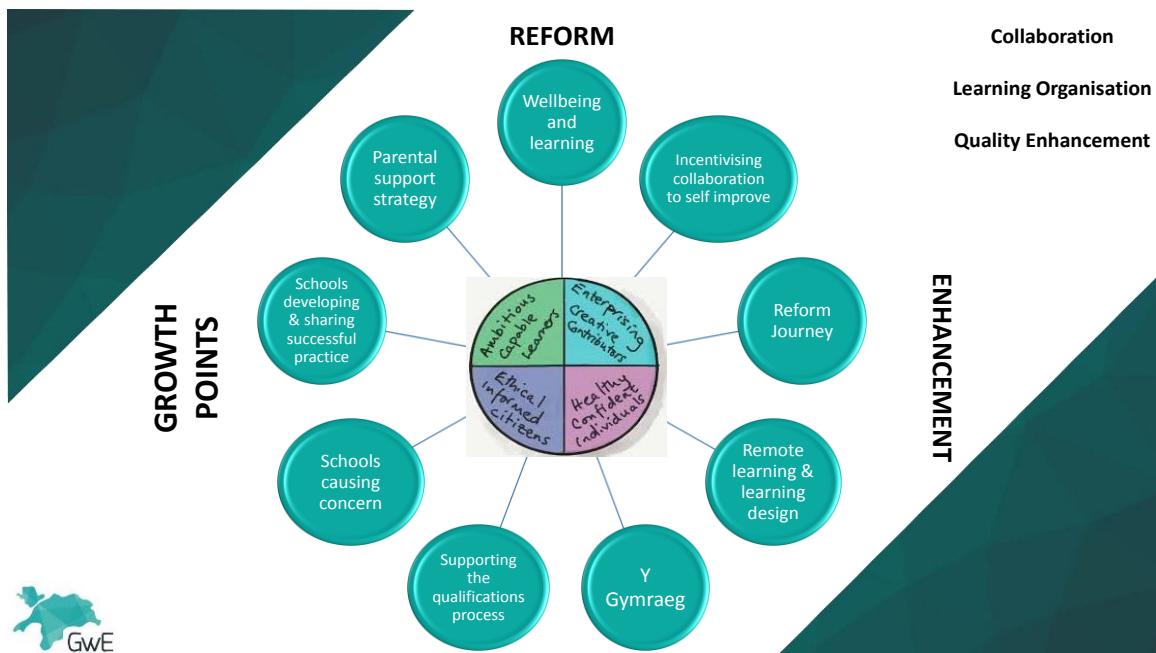
- Effective collegiate and collective regional approach between the six local authorities and GwE.
- Joint working has ensured strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster/alliance/forum level has ensured effective co-constructed strategic thinking and direction.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for effective repurposing of both the service and its schools.
- Schools are well informed and confident that effective support is available should any needs arise.

- School leaders' wellbeing supported through regular and clear communication.
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both Remote/Distance and Blended Learning.
- Schools provided with coherent guidance and resources to effectively support vulnerable learners with their wellbeing, engagement and learning.
- Best practice being shared across schools and clusters, i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems, blended learning models, etc.

Other outcomes and impact

- Effective communication provided via single point of contact (SIA) for school leaders and ease of access to support.
- Schools have been able to remain open to key workers in the event of staff shortages.
- Schools are well informed and confident that support is available should any needs arise. School leaders' wellbeing is supported through regular communication.
- Shared understanding of the importance of the welfare of pupils, parents and staff
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both distance/remote and blended learning.
- Schools having access to a wealth of quality resources for reference as they plan for and deliver distance/remote and blended learning.
- Comprehensive distance/remote and blended learning models available for schools to adopt, adapt or refer to. This has in turn ensured strengthened leadership and improved balance of work that can be completed at home.
- Co-ordinated approach to supporting schools which has led to greater consistency and quality of distance/remote and blended learning across the region.
- Best practice being shared across schools i.e. engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems etc.
- Strengthened use of ICT to enable effective communication between schools, within schools and with school stakeholders.
- School staff being upskilled through the use of a digital platform for professional development.
- Information shared with the LA is up to date and timely support is given to any School.
- In conjunction with the LA, ensured that the process of appointing school leadership candidates is appropriate and fair.
- Consistent messages disseminated to schools by GwE / LA officers.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster level through digital means ensuring co-constructed strategic thinking.
- Strengthened collaboration between local authority officers and GwE.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for adapting schools for different purposes.
- Effective cascading of key messages to school staff to ensure consistency and clarity.
- Increased collaboration between regions and other stakeholders.
- Increased understanding of key messages and work streams.
- Stronger awareness amongst school leaders of effective strategies to ensure continuation of school business.
- Quality Professional Learning developed in readiness for future needs.
- Newly Qualified Teachers having clarity regarding completing their induction year.
- Strong partnership work with Bangor University to ensure initial teacher training students have clarity on the appointment system for next year.
- Strong partnership working with Caban to ensure increased research opportunities and recognition of excellence by School staff.

Next steps and draft high level priorities 2021-22



The four purposes should be the starting point and aspiration for schools as they prepare to design the new curriculum and support their learners to become:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world; and
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

Our draft priorities outlined below are aimed to support schools as they work towards those four purposes.

1. Wellbeing and Learning

- Continue to work closely in partnership with Local Authorities to provide wellbeing support for practitioners and learners in schools and settings.
- Continue to provide support to school leaders on the identification, engagement and support for specific groups of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners including those who have been disproportionately affected by school closures.

2. Incentivising collaboration to self-improve

- Further strengthen the culture, behaviour, systems and processes so that leaders and teachers are incentivised to adopt a collegiate approach to school improvement.
- Continue to work closely with schools and settings in order to continue to deepen the peer work already established, and to identify the aspects that schools could offer to other schools to develop specific aspects of Professional Learning.
- Provide professional learning to further develop peer review.

3. Reform Journey

- Provide professional learning and bespoke support and guidance to schools and settings to help them realise the Reform Journey and prepare for the new curriculum.
- Develop a regional qualitative framework for holistically capturing and evaluating progress in a school.

4. Remote learning and Learning Design

- Support schools and settings to ensure that their remote learning provision is designed to provide a high quality learning experience for their pupils.
- Continue to share regionally developed exemplars – modelled approaches for teaching and learning as part of remote learning.
- Support schools and settings to evaluate current practice for remote and blended learning, identifying strengths and areas for development.
- Support schools and settings to evaluate pupil's progress and to identify the next steps for their development.

5. Y Gymraeg

- Provide support for schools and settings who teach through the medium of Welsh as their first language to improve the Welsh First Language skills of their learners, and especially those from non-Welsh speaking homes.

6. Supporting the qualifications process

- Support schools and settings to implement the recommendations of the Design and Delivery Board for the awarding of qualifications in 2021 and 2022.

7. Schools Causing Concern

- Intensively support secondary schools in statutory category, and those causing concern, to improve performance.
- Provide bespoke support to schools and settings in line with agreed school improvement priorities that reflect the current situation and positions of schools and settings.

8. Schools developing and sharing successful practice

- Provide access to a range of regional and national professional learning, including access to coaching and mentoring, for all educational practitioners in schools and settings that is appropriate to their role and responsibility in line with professional standards.
- Continue to work with clusters/alliances in the region to collect, collate and make available blended learning resources as part of an online resource library.
- Continue to facilitate cluster/alliance working and peer to peer support to ensure the continuity of learning and sharing of effective practice and lessons learned from a range of schools and settings for remote and blended learning.

9. Parental support strategy

- Develop a parental support strategy to help parents and carers on how to best support their child's learning.

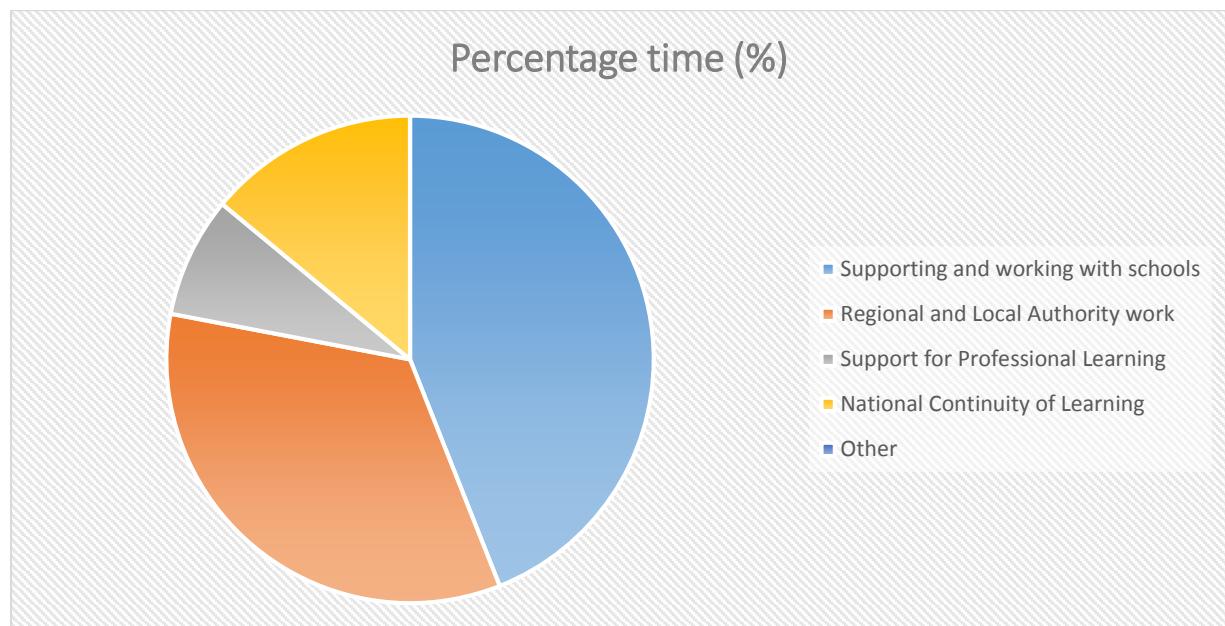
***Additional note:** We will be continuing to ensure appropriate use of grant funding allocated to schools.

Appendix 1: Documented activities and time spent

All Supporting Improvement Advisers (SIAs) ‘check-in’ with their line manager each morning and a list of their daily tasks is documented in their calendars. Below is a summary, of the activities that have been undertaken by GwE staff since the first lockdown:

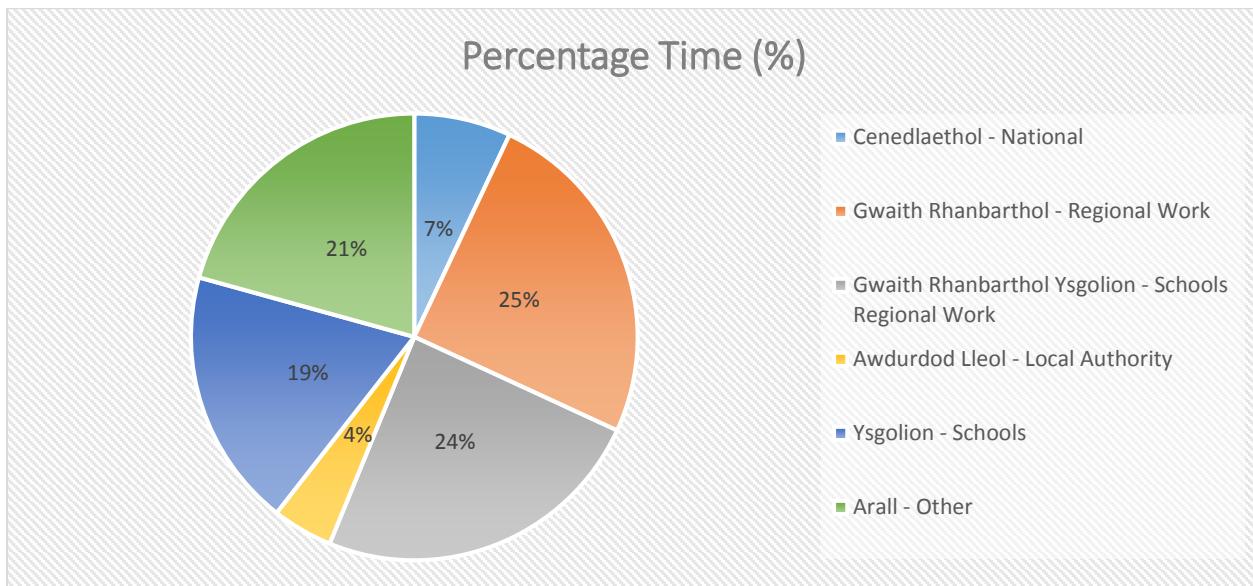
1. Covering the period between March 23rd and May 22nd, 2020.

Category	Hours	%
Supporting and working with schools	9049	44%
Regional and Local Authority work	6992	34%
Support for Professional Learning	1645	8%
National Continuity of Learning	2879	14%
Other	45	<1%



2. Covering the period between June 1st and July 17th, 2020.

Category	Hours	%
National	1044	7%
Regional Work	3704	25%
Schools - Regional work in supporting schools	3619	24%
Local Authority meetings	653	4%
Schools – bespoke/cluster support	2788	19%
Other, e.g., preparing, developing guidance/resources, researching, reading, improving digital skills (webinars), etc	3084	21%



3. Covering the period between September 1st and December 31, 2020.

Category	Hours	%
National	2284	6%
Regional Work	10675	28%
Local Authority	2284	6%
Schools - Supporting and working with schools (virtual), school visits, supporting the work of clusters and alliances, Professional Learning	11789	31%
Schools - Headteachers' Performance Management	380	1%
Accelerated Learning	3423	9%
Other	7223	19%

