



Collaborating · Learning · Succeeding

GwE Annual Report

2020-2021



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1. 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 2020, 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 3rd 2020, 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, 2020 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.

On January 4th 2021, schools remained closed to all children except those of key workers and some vulnerable learners following the introduction of a second lockdown period, with schools providing remote learning for most of the spring term.

In the week commencing 22nd February 2021, under 7s in the foundation phase started back at schools, with other primary school children and older secondary students (Years 11 and 13) returning back on 15th March 2021. From 12th April 2021 primary, special and secondary schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) returned to provide onsite provision for all learners.

This year’s GwE Annual Report outlines how GwE have repurposed several times during the COVID pandemic to provide effective services and support for all their school communities and how it has responded to Estyn recommendations provided to local authorities and regional consortium in their thematic report. It also describes how schools are been supported to implement the reform journey and prepare for the new curriculum, and identifies strategic and regional priorities for 2021-22.

2. GwE WORK PROGRAMME AND SUPPORT TO SCHOOL DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

Staff in the Local Authorities and GwE have adapted their work over the last year 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 this 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 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 also conducted face to face pastoral visits on behalf of the Local Authorities during the autumn term and also when schools reopened in spring 2021 after the second lockdown period.

GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the pandemic 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 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 or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance 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 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 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 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 during the academic year. This has supported schools to have a better strategic overview of their provision.

GwE has also supported schools in evaluating the quality of their blended learning and remote learning provision, sharing local examples and case studies of effective provision to reduce variation where it exists. Live streaming developed well and enhanced the blended learning experience. Schools soon realised that COVID will be with them for an extended period and are now planning more strategically and effectively. As schools and settings have become more confident with the delivery of remote learning, they are 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 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 remote/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 current academic year, 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 has included:

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

Schools in the GwE region have a significant collection of resources for each age group. Resources can be accessed through the GwE Support Centre:

<http://cefnogaeth.gwegogledd.cymru/?lang=en>

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.

<https://www.gwegogledd.cymru/professional-learning/?lang=en>



3. MAIN IMPACT OF GwE WORK DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The main impact of GwE work during the pandemic is outlined below:

- 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/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 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.
- Schools and settings have built upon several growth points in preparation for the new curriculum and generally have:
 - a more adaptable and skilled teaching profession;
 - greater focus and emphasise on both learner and staff wellbeing;
 - improved digital competency amongst staff, pupils and parents;
 - a more blended approach to teaching and learning;
 - improved partnerships with parents.

Other outcomes and impact include:

- Effective communication provided via single point of contact (Supporting Improvement Adviser)) 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 and Blended Learning.
- Schools having access to a wealth of quality resources for reference as they plan for and deliver distance and blended learning.
- Comprehensive distance 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 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.

4. ESTYN THEMATIC REPORT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY AND REGIONAL CONSORTIA SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS AND PRUs IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

During the early autumn term, the Welsh Government asked Estyn to undertake a review of local authorities and regional consortia's work in supporting their learning communities in schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) during the period from March to October 2020.

In January 2021, Estyn published a thematic report titled 'Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19'. The full report is included in Appendix 1.

In addition, GwE received a letter outlining the outcome of this work in the region. The letter is included in Appendix 2.

The Estyn recommendations for the Welsh Government to work with regional consortia, local authorities, and other partners and providers were to:

R1: Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity;

R2: Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs;

R3: Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals;

R4: Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils;

R5: Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design.

5. GwE RESPONSE TO ESTYN RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THEMATIC REPORT

During the spring term (January 2021 – April 2021), GwE have addressed the Estyn recommendations outlined in Section 4 above. A summary of the work is outlined below.

R1: Urgently address barriers to learning at home, particularly where this is due to a lack of access to suitable computers or adequate connectivity

Local Authorities have worked with schools to enable all learners to access remote education during this period. Access challenges for learners have largely been met by the commitment, creativity and persistence of schools. Schools have loaned significant numbers of laptops/Raspberry Pis/wireless dongles to learners who do not have them at home from their own resources and have accessed grants or used donations to help fill gaps when needed. They have also recalibrated their expectations around timetables to support asynchronous/recorded approaches to allow access to a single device by more than one user in a household. Where necessary, paper copies of work have been delivered to households throughout lockdown. These approaches have had a significant impact of the engagement of some learners.

R2: Improve the quality of the distance and blended learning experiences for pupils by supporting more effective teaching across and within schools and PRUs

Remote and blended learning provision

- GwE have supported schools to make effective use of blended learning and recovery curriculum guidance to plan retrieval practice and new learning when returning to face-to-face teaching and learning.
- Regular meetings with head teachers (individually) and through head teacher forums have initiated and prompted reflective practice and the sharing of practice and ideas.
- Individual support has been given to a number of senior leaders and heads of department – particularly where leaders are new - and to teachers in the authority, including NQTs. Networking meetings – Foundation phase teachers/ Literacy and Numeracy leads/ curriculum leaders/ heads of subject/ heads of VI Form – have been well received and proved mutually supportive. Coaching support is also being provided for a number of leaders in schools.
- All schools received guidance documentation regarding Remote and Distance learning to support Head teachers and teachers in planning remote learning as part of provision for learners, to assist schools in managing parental and stakeholder expectations, supporting schools to make best use of live learning and to enable schools to evaluate remote learning practices and when reporting to stakeholders including governing bodies.
- All schools received guidance for parents on remote and distance learning. These documents were co-created between schools and GwE / LA officers.
- Weekly discussions with Head teachers in a pastoral role included discussions around blended and distance learning.
- The collaborative sharing of blended learning materials allowed resources to be seen by SIAs and enabled

feedback to be given on the quality of the work.

- Some SIAs received invitations to attend live lessons with learners.
- GwE have reported to the Joint Committee and to various LA scrutiny committees throughout the period, bringing together an evaluation on the provision during the period.
- The GwE Supporting Improvement Advisor work programme from March 2021 has been based around co-evaluating the provision during the lockdown period, return to school and identifying development needs that have arisen from the period.

Strengths and shortcomings in the provision of remote and blended learning for pupils

- The strengths that have been noted include the use of digital technology in allowing the learning to take place, collaboration including sharing of resources and practices, partnerships with parents and development of different types of pedagogy over the period.
- Collaboration within the schools and across the schools has also been a major strength over the period. Despite having to make considerable adaptations to operational practices due to Covid, schools continue to be very reflective on their own plans and actions and are fully embracing and adapting parameters in order to improve further. Alliance / Cluster working and Peer Review involvement are all a demonstration of the commitment schools have in looking to draw down good practice and develop a stronger foundation for an approach as learning organisations and self-improving schools.
- Secondary Alliances have identified Teaching and Learning as a priority – collaborating to develop effective classroom pedagogies; intelligent technologies and engagement in both online and face to face learning; and feedback and assessment. GwE facilitate the T&L forum meetings and to date schools have shared effective practice / resources and identified next steps to develop the collaboration and provision in schools. This collaboration has ensured more consistency in provision across the authority.
- Areas that schools have found difficult include the consistency of learner engagement. This has been variable both within schools and across schools and has limited learner progress where engagement has been low. IT equipment, both software and hardware has also limited provision and progress in some cases. Where provision has been inconsistent, SIAs have worked with the school to ensure teachers are well equipped to provide an education for learners.
- Engagement levels have increased over the second lockdown period.
- Where things that haven't been as successful, consistency, capacity of the infrastructure, ensuring continuity of feedback.

Supporting schools to develop teaching and learning strategies that build the resilience of pupils' learning and develop their independent skills

- During this period, more than ever, schools have had to ensure continuous learning opportunities for all staff in order to ensure that they are able to deliver effective distance learning and to use technology creatively in order to facilitate this distance learning. Through the Professional Learning Grant teachers have engaged in relevant and timely professional learning during the last year to ensure that they have a firm understanding of what effective distance learning should look like. In some schools this has included weekly cluster meetings, head teachers' forums, subject specific training and developing remote learning models within teams or across clusters.
- During lockdown, there were opportunities for schools to work as learning organisations to strengthen and develop the 4 transversal themes of Time, Thinking Together, Trust and Technology. There has been the

promotion of team learning and collaboration among schools and staff to ensure that schools are able to deliver effective distance learning to all their students.

- Professional Learning has continued during the period. Examples of this have been PL given by the Foundation Phase Team which has included:

NQT training on Language, Literacy and Communication with the main focus of session on reading

- How do we teach reading?
- Strategies to engage the 'Love of Reading'
- What are higher order reading skills?
- Ideas for challenging reading tasks in the enriched and continuous provision

And further professional learning on developing mathematical, numerical and numeracy skills across all areas of learning and provision delivered on request from clusters and high risk/ schools in statutory category/Estyn follow up. Further professional learning included 'The Role of the Adult' aimed at practitioners facilitating the learning in the FP. This focused on:

- Effective questioning e.g. Blank levels of questioning to encourage children to reflect and to develop their higher order thinking and oracy skills
- Effective strategies to promote and develop independent learners

- Whilst there is still a focus on current logistical challenges, Headteachers have been keen to keep developing aspects of teaching and learning. 'Secondary Alliance' and Primary Cluster Plans have been finalised and networking in this way has been a valuable strategy for sharing best practice. School SLTs have found the EDT SPP Peer Review training also extremely valuable in supporting evaluation.
- As a Consortium we have ensured that we have promoted the use of Remote Asynchronous Learning Design through our weekly bulletin. We have also tasked several our subject advisors to work with secondary schools to delve deeper into the RALD Modules and develop effective practice examples which will be hosted on our new website. We have 25 resources thus far which include PowerPoints, videos, Podcasts and Vodcasts from teachers and students alike.
- We see asynchronous and synchronous learning design as an integral part of teaching and learning moving forward and will endeavour to upskill one practitioner from every catchment area who can then cascade the learning to all schools.

Coping with any future periods where blended and distance learning may be necessary

- In the primary sector, Supporting Improvement Advisors have worked closely with their link cluster, facilitating collaboration around effective classroom pedagogy, feedback and assessment and the use of technology to enhance provision during this time. Schools have evaluated that they were in a far stronger position to provide an education during the second lockdown period and that if at any time they have to return to a period of lockdown, they have processes and resources in place to do this effectively.
- Alliances and Clusters have mutually shared resources in blended learning, initially within alliances and clusters and then via the regional resource. This sharing was also supported by a full exchange of ideas around progress in blended learning, approaches to teaching and learning in the pandemic including assessment and experiences of agile and effective approaches to professional learning. These resources can be accessed in the school to school resource section of the Regional Support Centre - Regional Support Centre. GwE have regular meetings with schools to support schools to evaluate provision and their quality assurance activities – identifying strengths, areas to develop and planning PL opportunities for staff. Schools have captured good practice and shared across the school e.g. resources on shared drive, staff website on online learning, every teacher to

create a case study of best practice, weekly drop-in sessions for teachers to share good practice and challenges, designing INSET to develop staff digital skills and confidence.

- The following resource centre data has been made available up to the end of April:

	PUBLISHED RESOURCES	UNPUBLISHED RESOURCES
FPh	35	56
KS2	75	73
KS3	52	14
KS4	75	41
KS5	5	2

- Number of page views since launch - 20,000
- Number of resources downloaded since launch - 3,400
- Most visited page - KS2 School to School resource

R3: Develop a coherent approach to improve progress in literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils disproportionately affected by the pandemic, for example pupils eligible for free school meals

Advice and guidance provided to schools to support their use of additional funding to support pupils whose skills have been affected by the pandemic

The consortia additional PDG funding has funds on support for schools/settings in three categories:

- Teaching and whole-school strategies
- Targeted support to accelerate learning and supporting key groups of learners
- Wider strategies (including supporting parents and carers)

The above model focused on both universal and targeted approaches (using the FMS/LAC data as source for targeting schools/settings).

- Production of literacy resource materials and translation of High Frequency Word strategy/Rapid Reading strategy for all learners.
- Numeracy Catch Up - Transfer of key stage 2 SAFMEDS cards onto CRAM app for accessibility for all learners across the region / transfer of key stage 3 Mathematics materials into SAFMEDS cards and CRAM app.
- Universal I Literacy Catch Up Programme - see targeted support
- Universal Health and Wellbeing resources and programmes
- RADY Pilot - We targeted schools in areas with high numbers of FSM/Vulnerable Learners.
- All schools/settings have access to Thinking Differently about disadvantaged learners as part of the professional learning offer

Wider Strategies

- SEAL** - In regards to universal Health and Wellbeing we purchased the SEAL license for all settings and LA's across the region. Most schools have accessed this.
- Trauma / ACE Informed Schools** – over 1500 attended the session and we currently have our Cohort 5 10-day

Diploma. We also have 1 school with the highest number of FMS working towards the TIS benchmark /award.

3. **Talk boost** – we have up skilled both SIA's and LA staff in regards to Early Years Interventions for the development of Speech and Language via the TA's.
 4. **ELSA** – we have also increased the ELSA training from our regional ALN/Inclusion group to target settings who have had no staff trained / or increase capacity, this will cover the training, resources in both languages and ongoing supervision by the Education Psychology Team in each of the LA. All schools and settings via the LA have accessed the offer.
- In many schools the RRRS grant has been allocated to support pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Additional staffing achieved through the RRRS grant have been given the opportunity for smaller groups or further targeted interventions across all Key Stages. Schools have appointed additional Teaching Assistants to work with learners on their literacy and numeracy and to support the vulnerable learners attending hubs in school. Small intervention groups are identified, and targeted support is offered through extraction groups. Literacy and Numeracy catch-up programmes delivered by trained TAs have been increased to encompass more pupils (focusing on standardised scores). Attempting to deliver this remotely has proved more difficult than whole class teaching. Learner and parental feedback strongly indicate that this additional provision is being warmly received.
 - Schools have attended a range of Professional Learning opportunities, including live remote sessions and online webinars introducing a range of strategies and resources. A cohesive support package has been in place for schools to help them improve the quality of teaching and maximise learner outcomes, especially of vulnerable learners. These resources focus on improving the following aspects:
 - ✓ Basic reading and reading fluency
 - ✓ Reading comprehension and vocabulary skills
 - ✓ Basic numeracy and numeracy fluency skills
 - ✓ Improving pupils and learning and revision strategies
 - ✓ Some of the strategies and support materials were designed to be used in school and by parents at home to support their child's learning
 - This has ensured well informed School Leadership Teams knowing how best to support Teaching and Learning in supporting literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills of vulnerable pupils. It has also ensured that Teaching/support staff have been upskilled in the identification of literacy and numeracy needs of every learner and/whilst promoting independent learning. These resources can be found on the regional support centre - [GwE Support Centre](#)
 - GwE have supported schools that have completed national tests during the autumn term to analyse the data and plan evidence based practice.
 - Secondary Alliances and Primary Clusters have shared effective practice on developing pupils' interaction and social skills during live-streamed lessons e.g. interactive digital tools, effective use of breakout rooms, whole school campaign 'switch your camera on'.

Specific schools or cohorts of pupils disproportionately affected

We have worked closely with each LA to ensure all Looked After Children (LAC) have access to digital resources with evidence of ongoing dialogue with WG and its impact. The LAC PDG individual bursary was made available to support any identified gaps / additional support required. In addition, many non-teaching staff (such as Social Workers/ ESW'S) attended some of the professional learning offer in regards to trauma informed practise. The cluster LAC PDG model was flexible in regards to how schools/cluster used the grant and some of the funds has been used to increase 1:1 and Play Therapy sessions/ELSA/Friends. We also adapted our professional learning offer to Designated Teachers

to support the remote learning and transition back to school.

- Schools have adapted their provision and school timetable based on pupils and parents questionnaires. Further sessions have been arranged for pastoral tutors to meet with pupils in small groups to offer social interaction between peers and to discuss what has worked well and the barriers to online learning.
- In Secondary schools the use of data tracking and intervention has improved using the new 4Matrix data packs and data walls. Regular conversations about learners and their progress are taking place and allowing targeted intervention work.
- Where family / learner engagement has been low, learners from English speaking families who attend Welsh medium schools have made limited progress or have shown some regression. GwE have worked closely with LA colleagues to produce resources, provide support and to plan for recovery. This includes the appointment of a new 'Y Gymraeg' lead within GwE to ensure robust planning for recovery support and to strengthen collaboration between GwE officers and LA in supporting schools.
- Ensuring the needs of MAT pupils has stayed on school's agenda by contributing to cross-consortia info-posters with tips to help leaders, parents, practitioners and pupils themselves with blended learning. Small groups are targeted for after-school intervention to reach A*-A grades. This work has been done in conjunction with training from GwE. The introduction of Additional Maths for the most able has encouraged the development of the higher-level skills required for A*-A.
- Schemes of work in KS3 are under review to ensure engagement and challenge of all ability groups, adopting the new teaching and learning strategies highlighted in the GwE training.
- GwE have supported schools that have completed national tests during the autumn term to analyse the data and plan evidence-based practice.
- Strong structures in place to monitor pupil engagement during online learning – attendance, interaction and completing work. Schools are contacting families when there are concerns and supporting learners that have personal and social anxiety.

Specific skill areas affected

Through co-evaluation with schools, the impact on learner skills is seen to be variable across the region. Where learner engagement has been low, basic skills have been impacted upon as well as learner social skills and readiness for learning. The RRRS support for schools has been put in place to support schools in Literacy and Numeracy. The RILL (Remote Instruction of Language and Literacy) project has been established to support schools in re-igniting learning and developing basic skills, especially vulnerable learners. The project is fully bilingual and has been piloted with 15 primary schools across the region. There will be a regional roll out from this term with all primary schools, inviting engagement with their vulnerable learners. Two research officers will enable us to train all interested schools across the region and give them access to the programme, offer ongoing support and drop-in implementation sessions, provide additional support to target pupils/families over the summer holiday and to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.

Further support for schools in the core subjects include:

Mathematics

- Developed accelerating learning resources, guidance and support – focusing on evidence based strategies for improving fluency and recall in basic numeracy skills, and ensuring resources are accessible to all and suitable for a blended learning scenario.

- ✓ shared overview in Heads of Maths and Numeracy Coordinators meetings.
 - ✓ offered professional learning opportunities for teachers and teaching assistants in the form of online webinars.
 - ✓ bespoke 'One to one' school support to address specific needs.
- Half termly Heads of Maths meetings, where time has been used to share GwE's Blended and Distance learning guidance, including exemplar subject specific models of effective and strategic planning for a blended learning scenario, share best practice in the region and facilitate discussions on effective, practical strategies for T&L.
 - Additional professional learning opportunities has been organised for Mathematics teachers:
 - ✓ 'Teaching Mathematics to mixed ability classes' online workshop: focusing on sharing good practice, research findings, practical resources and strategies that focuses on differentiating and ensuring an appropriate level of challenge for all.
 - ✓ 'Distance learning in Mathematics' online workshop: delivered by a leading practitioner in the region, focusing on effective use of online platforms for asynchronous & synchronous teaching, sharing and modelling practical strategies for engaging all learners, and using assessment for learning to steer planning in the right direction.
 - Programme of support put in place to support newly qualified teachers during the pandemic.
 - Network meeting specifically for early career Mathematics teachers: focusing on sharing practical resources, guidance and additional CPD opportunities. Facilitated discussions on sharing good practice and planning for the future.

English

- Delivered subject specific training focussing on delivering elements of the English curriculum remotely – oracy and writing.
- Effective retrieval practice identified as an essential aspect in remote teaching in order to assess prior learning and make connections. Training session open to English teachers across the region and a forum to share best practice established.
- Bespoke support provided to schools in delivering key elements of the GCSE English/ Literature course remotely. This work has focussed on supporting the development of learning plans and teaching resources.
- Best practice case studies identified in English and shared regionally.
- Programme of support put in place to support newly qualified teachers during the pandemic. Seven week programme/ practical sessions focussing on effective teaching and learning particularly in remote settings.
- Literacy Intervention Programme developed based on the needs and feedback from secondary schools. Two tiered, comprehensive package of resources to support teachers and teaching assistants in developing the literacy skills of identified learners. Programme is used widely across the region /package of professional learning to support teaching assistants.
- Bespoke training provided to schools with high numbers of vulnerable learners focussing on accelerating literacy skills.
- Development of the Herio website and KS4 instructional videos to support learners. These can be accessed through an app or through the website
- Bespoke reading pilot introduced to 10 secondary schools across the region. Schools with our highest numbers of LAC/ FSM learners have been targeted. 'Building Reading Power' is a pilot which aims to improve the reading skills of struggling readers who also lack motivation and interest. Schools involved have been provided with the practical resources they need as well as a programme of professional learning which focuses on effective teaching of reading; building fluency; improving engagement and strengthening reading habits at home. As

well as upskilling classroom teachers, we are also working with TAs and Learning Coaches. Bangor University are working with GwE on this project to monitor and evaluate the impact of this pilot. If successful, this will be shared regionally.

Science

- Development of the blended learning guidance and modelled examples, which has been shared with all Heads of Science through network meetings and with individual departments.
- Development of GCSE booklets to support learners who cannot access digitally – shared with all departments.
- Modelling of online quizzes and knowledge organisers to assess pupil progress – with key departments.
- Co-construction of schemes of learning for online delivery.
- Further development of the www.tanio.cymru website and creation of resources that have been used by both teachers and pupils from across the region.
- Programme of support put in place to support newly qualified teachers during the pandemic
- Co-construction of resources and training plan with the literacy lead to develop reading and oracy in Science. These have been used in key schools to support development of skills.
- Differentiated work booklets for GCSE pupils, identifying the key knowledge, terminology etc. have been produced and shared.
- Development of accessible assessment material (reduced reading age and complexity) /exam questions to support learners with less developed skills – both numeracy & literacy.
- Development of supporting materials and modelled examples to develop numeracy Skills in Science have been shared with key departments and training has been provided to support teachers to differentiate and deliver the numeracy.

Welsh

- Specific workshops were held for Heads of Welsh departments in the region on the blended teaching and learning of language
- Workshop entitled ‘Datblygu iaith a’r meddwl creadigol trwy ddysgu ac addysgu’n gyfunol’ held as part of the GwE professional learning offer.
- A series of ‘Be’ sy’n bosib?’ (GwE) workshops were held to promote the use of Google for Education digital tools and others (on Hwb digital platform). These open workshops proved to be very popular with primary and secondary teachers alike across the region.
- Specific support provided for Welsh departments to develop their resources and their interactive use of their digital platforms so as to enable them to target specific cohorts of pupils quickly.
- Members of Welsh departments were encouraged to joint national KS3, KS4 and KS5 working groups to develop innovative teaching and learning resources to share nationally via the Hwb platform.
- ‘Dysgu Carlam – Y Gymraeg’ resources were created specifically in order to support whole school literacy interventions.
- ‘Y Gymraeg ar Garlam’ scheme was established so that literacy co-ordinators and Heads of Welsh departments in the region can share resources to support interventions that target the cross-curricular literacy skills.

In response to the need to support and develop learners’ oracy skills a successful bid was made to Welsh Government to develop the ‘Ein Llais Ni’ oracy scheme (based on the ‘Dy Lais Di’ scheme which was piloted locally), and this scheme will be disseminated and embedded across the region.

How we are addressing this issue in our longer-term plans and policies

In regards to Health and Wellbeing the key areas of evidence from schools/settings are:

- Re Connecting friendship groups and relationships.
- Structure and Routine
- Targeting Physical Health – some learners have done no physical activity
- Increase in learners who are anxious
- Sleep patterns and attendance
- Speech and Language in the early years
- Digital gap in regards to tackling pupil/family poverty
- Further engagement with parents / carers
- Developing independent learners.
- Further requests for school counselling and some schools stating the need to additional school-based counsellors and CAMHS.

There is a need to build the above in to the school curriculum and planning.

The 2021-2022 Business Plans show that this aspect is an important part of our strategic objectives and regional priorities (see Section 8)

R4: Establish strategies to monitor and address the long-term impact of the pandemic on the physical and mental health of pupils

- GwE are ensuring that the Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being is central to our work with schools. A recent meeting of the regional key partners agreed on the Governance and accountability for the framework moving forward.
- GwE have also been working closely with Wellbeing Leads/Healthy School across the region to ensure we are consistent in our approach in supporting schools. We are currently mapping the GwE/LA universal Health and Wellbeing across the region and this should be available before half term.
- A week of PDG workshops: Impact and Evidence based Practice - took place between March 22 and 26 and was well attended by school practitioners and educational partners. This learning and sharing week, was a week-long celebration and sharing of work from across Wales regarding provision and progress of disadvantaged learners through targeted PDG expenditure. It was designed to highlight the importance of aligning PDG to research-based interventions and development in Teaching and Learning practices to assist the disadvantaged learner and engage in face-to-face learning. During the week, consortia, schools and settings and professional partners put on a range of professional learning workshops, discussions and talks. This is available on the HWB platform with 18 hours of professional learning for schools/settings:

https://www.gwegogledd.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rhaglen-GDD-_-PDG-Focus-Week-Programme.pdf

- The Directors of Education across the region have identified parental engagement as a regional priority. A regional group with representation from each authority has been set up to look at a strategy to help parents / carers support their child's learning. We have worked closely with Mike Gershon, author of more than 40 books

on teaching, learning and education, including numerous bestsellers in rolling out bilingual online teaching resources in supporting the role of parents / carers in helping their children to learn. The resources and website that Mike Gershon has developed is a strong starting point for supporting parents and we have been working with Mike to ensure that the website is bilingual and free to every parent in North Wales.

- GwE have also worked with an external partner (an expert in well-being, change and resilience) in running a series of wellbeing workshops 'Looking after myself' aimed at school and LA staff. The sessions explore the meaning of well-being and how we can create a balanced perspective about work and life. These workshops have been used in group situations or by individuals. As well as providing information and tips on wellbeing and resilience, they have been designed to give the workforce time and space to consider how well prepared they are to face the challenges of a rapidly changing external environment.

The four workshops focus on a different aspect of wellbeing:

Session 1: Understanding my Resilience and Reaction to Change - <https://youtu.be/tDkLAaEoFjs>

Session 2: The Keys to Resilience-Developing Vision and Purpose - https://youtu.be/nuRVRI_M7c8

Session 3: The Keys to Resilience-Developing Emotional Intelligence - https://youtu.be/vudqzc_jnMw

Session 4: Healthy Living - <https://youtu.be/37z5H73oelg>

Each workshop lasts between 45-60 minutes including time build in for personal / group reflection and they can be used as a series of workshops or you can use them discretely as single sessions.

- Several school leaders have been offered a 'reflective space' to engage with an external coach to discuss any aspect of their own wellbeing. A number of Head teachers from across the region have taken up this offer and have provided positive feedback regarding the process.

Impact of the pandemic on pupils' mental health

Schools and settings have used a range of wellbeing measures / surveys to gather evidence on the mental health of learners. LA's & Schools have used and accessed the Children's Commissioner Office Me and Coronavirus Survey in order to further target key areas within their curriculum. For example, some schools have used the Edinburgh Warwick mental Health scale. Other schools have implemented the Trauma Informed Schools I wish my Teacher Knew survey to get learners to reflect and move forward.

Some schools have used the 'Drawing and Talking' intervention with LAC as a meta emotion philosophy in regards to reflecting on feelings and developing emotional literacy. Another procured the service of a Drama Consultant to work with all learners from year 7-9 to discuss the impact of school lockdown on mental health via an art-based workshop.

GwE have also worked with the Mental Health UK Charity to support the implementation of the BLOOM mental Health school programme across the region. The curriculum resource is available in both Welsh/English - targeting learners at KS 4 and Post 16. More than half of the secondary schools attended the sessions with bespoke session in

Welsh. One school implemented the programme with the sixth form with focus on:

- Building Resilience
- Exam Stress and managing pressure
- Social pressures
- Friendships

Support provided to schools so far to help them address pupils' needs

GwE have supported individual pastoral staff in both primary and secondary schools, focus has been on up skilling staff in universal approaches to supporting health and wellbeing and mental health of learners. Examples include the increase in the number of school who have accessed the professional learning offer in Trauma Informed Schools/ Relational Play and also managing anxiety in children. We have also adapted our professional learning offer for Designated Person to include a section on effective strategies.

Schools have also accessed the SEAL resources in addition to our resources in the support centre.

The national PDG focus week was also about supporting vulnerable learners and strategies for schools to use.

GwE have also targeted 50 schools across the region to participate in the Adoption Cymru/WG pilot in regards to professional learning offer and membership for schools.

R5: Create opportunities to take stock and evaluate the impact of policies and practices developed since the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and curriculum design

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 have also worked on a weekly basis from the beginning of spring 2021 with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop its own staff to effectively support schools with the new curriculum.

Reports to GwE Joint Committee have included:

- Transition back into school
- Wellbeing
- Blended learning Resources
- Re-starting learning model for North Wales
- GwE work programme and Regional Priorities
- Qualifications
- Annual Report 2019-20
- Professional Learning - GwE offer to schools Summer Term 2020
- Accelerated Learning Programme
- ALN Transformation
- Schools in category
- Budget monitoring
- Annual Budget

- Supporting Schools
- Reform Journey & Professional Learning
- Distance / Remote Learning and parent / carer engagement
- Developing Accelerated Learning programmes for the Welsh language
- Estyn Thematic Review
- Governance Arrangements: Internal Audit
- Internal Audit Reports
- Risk Register

The current work programme for SIAs with every school involves working in partnership self-evaluating the school's provision during the past year. This includes evaluating the impact GwE's support during the period and also future support needs for schools and clusters. The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of our internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on our current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities (see Section 8 on 2021-22 Business Plan Priorities).

The lessons learnt from the start of the pandemic to inform future ways of working and to support schools with the new curriculum is addressed in Section 6 below.

6. SUPPORT DURING THE PANDEMIC THAT HAS PROVIDED GROWTH POINTS IN PREPARATION FOR THE NEW CURRICULUM

The response to COVID-19 has of course had a significant impact on schools and is likely to have disrupted some of their plans for preparation and implementing the new curriculum. However, the education reform programme in Wales, built around the new Curriculum for Wales (CfW), provides a positive way forward as we emerge from the restrictions of the last year. It has at its heart a number of guiding ideas:

- That the curriculum and associated teaching, learning and assessment should flow from four clear purposes agreed nationally and pursued locally.
- That those purposes should encompass helping all of our young people to become: **ambitious and capable learners; enterprising and creative contributors; ethical and informed citizens; and healthy and confident individuals.**
- That young people's learning should build progressively towards those four purposes across their time in school education.
- That teachers and schools should have greater freedom to realise those purposes in ways that can meet the needs and characteristics of the young people and the communities that they serve.

These basic ideas give rise to a number of important implications:

- That the national curriculum framework should establish necessary national consistency of purpose and approach but leave wide scope for local decision making about key aspects of learning and teaching.
- That curriculum making is a process that should involve collaboration amongst teachers, schools and wider interests.
- That accountability should not inhibit the quality or narrow the scope of learning. Wherever possible it should pursue quality enhancement rather than narrow quality assurance.
- The success of the reform programme should be judged against the extent to which it leads to better and more relevant learning for young people and to higher standards of achievement. Both the quality of the learning and the nature of standards should relate to the extent to which the agreed purposes are being realised in practice for all young people.

The impact of the pandemic has naturally influenced how schools and settings can move forward with the reform. They need to re-establish the relevance of its four guiding purposes for Wales's young people. In many ways the pandemic has made those four purposes more relevant than ever as schools seek to build the confidence of their young people and rekindle their desire to learn. Schools have had to think deeply about what matters in learning during periods of interrupted schooling and the four purposes of the new Curriculum for Wales stand up well to that examination. The pandemic has also required changes to the nature of the teaching and learning process, not least in the ways in which digital technologies can enhance possibilities for more independent learning.

How schools and settings will continue to be supported on their journey to implementing the new curriculum from September 2022

Our regional priorities for 2021-22 are a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering the reform journey and the new curriculum. Our approach to the reform journey has been integrated in all aspects of our work from the beginning. Not one element of the reform journey can stand alone. It is viewed from the need of learners and the baseline of individual schools and clusters to deliver change according to agreed expectations.

The four purposes outlined in the 'Curriculum for Wales' guidance 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.

The regional priorities are aimed to support schools and settings as they work towards those four purposes. All regional work aligns with the document 'Journey to 2022' which was published in October 2020 and co-created by Estyn, the 4 regions and Welsh Government (see Appendix 3). This document identifies a series of phases that schools will undergo as part of their preparations for the new Curriculum for Wales and these include engagement, design, trialling and planning and finally evaluating and preparing for first teaching.

As part of the support to schools for the new Curriculum for Wales, GwE has worked with the other regional consortia to develop a national professional learning offer that integrates all aspects of the wider reform including Schools as Learning Organisations, Y Gymraeg (towards a million Welsh speakers by 2050) and the Additional Learning Needs Transformational Bill. This cross regional offer is aimed at supporting all school practitioners, and focuses initially on Senior Leaders with the following themes:

- Leading Change
- Leadership for the new curriculum
- Developing a Shared Vision
- Planning for Curriculum Change – to include curriculum design, progression and assessment
- Leading Pedagogy
- Time and Space for Professional Learning

This professional learning offer was originally scheduled to begin in spring term 2020, however was naturally paused due to the priorities of the Covid-19 pandemic. In discussions with Head teachers across GwE, the professional learning resumed virtually in January 2021 with the Leading Change session. The planned sequence of professional learning available to schools is outlined in Appendix 4. These sessions across the region are cluster-based and enable smaller groups of primary schools and their local secondary school to discuss the new Curriculum for Wales across the 3-16 learning continuum. Across the region, 832 Senior Leaders attended these Leading Change sessions. In recognition of the re-opening of schools to all learners in March and April, the Professional Learning sessions were again paused in March 2021.

Following discussions with the Directors of Education through the GwE Management Board, a series of consultative workshops were held in April 2021 in each Local Authority to listen to feedback from Head teachers on the professional learning offer and how best to re-engage. Over 300 Head teachers attended the consultations.

Feedback indicated:

- Head teachers of both primary and secondary sectors recognise the importance of continuing to collaborate across the sectors to support the 3-16 continuum;
- All leaders recognise the importance of maintaining the momentum of the professional learning but acknowledge the challenge of timing given current pressures and challenges;
- Leaders are keen to work with GwE and to draw on the input of external experts where appropriate;
- Leaders recognise that flexibility in engaging with the professional learning offer is key to ensuring effective engagement.

To support re-engaging with the Curriculum for Wales work, a further leadership planning session has been planned for each individual cluster across the region to build capacity of clusters to collaborate across the requirements of the reform journey as a whole and form an agreed action plan for each cluster. As part of this, all Supporting Improvement Advisers have facilitated sessions where schools within a cluster have the opportunity to work collaboratively to strategically plan for the implementation of the curriculum. Adopting a flexible and sensitive approach to the timings of these sessions has been a key aspect of the discussions between GwE, the local authority and schools. Activities to support preparations for the new curriculum at school and cluster level have been identified within School Development Plans.

Examples of planned activities in schools include:

- identifying further opportunities for senior leaders to work on developing shared vision;
- collaborating across schools to develop common approaches to teaching and learning and share common language;
- identifying opportunities for teachers to collaborate to unpack and sense-make together within a specific *Area of Learning and Experience*.

The use of technology to collaboratively develop cluster plans and websites ensure that the dialogue is ongoing and Senior Leaders are able to continue this work, following discussions back at individual school level.

In addition to the Professional Learning offer, additional support from GwE is available to schools as they prepare for *Curriculum for Wales*. This support will be accessed at both cluster and individual school level, including tailored bespoke support where needed.

Further support available to schools also includes a series of 'Think-Pieces' which have been written by the GwE team as part of the weekly reform sessions with Professor Graham Donaldson. These papers, which cover key aspects of the curriculum reform journey including leadership, vision, pedagogy, assessment and curriculum design, have been shared and refined through consultation with wider partners in Local Authorities, Estyn and Bangor University. All senior leaders have been invited to attend a webinar in May 2021 to explain and share this work on the Think Pieces. These are included in *Appendix 5*.

A key aspect in moving forward will be supporting schools to develop networks across all six *Areas of Learning and Experience* (AoLE). As part of business plan priorities, GwE will invite and facilitate opportunities for school practitioners to engage with peers to consider planning and curriculum design within and across AOLEs to meet the needs of all learners to realise the four purposes of the new curriculum.

Working in collaboration with partners in Higher Education Institutes is a further priority for the region as GwE supports schools to develop the role of enquiry within the new *Curriculum for Wales*. This work is an important aspect of the wider work on developing effective teaching and learning, which in turn builds on the work of developing assessment for learning. For this purpose, GwE have worked with schools across the region over the last three years to develop and share effective practice in formative assessment using evidence based learning. There are 360 schools across the region participating in this work.

In supporting schools in their readiness for implementing the curriculum in September 2022, GwE are working with schools and wider partners to develop a wide range of qualitative indicators which will allow schools to reflect on how they are implementing the four purposes of the new curriculum. Furthermore, schools have access to a series of milestones within the regional information management system that allows them to reflect on their progress. Prior to the initial lockdown period in March 2020, over 90% of schools indicated that they were either partly on track or better in their knowledge and understanding of the new curriculum framework. Nearly all schools indicated that they were partly on track or better with their engagement and participation in cluster work for preparing for the new curriculum.

7. BUSINESS MATTERS

Staff Development

The consistency and quality of challenge and support to schools is good. Regular training, support and discussions ensure that Supporting Improvement Advisers' knowledge and understanding of national and local developments, and the implications of this on their roles, is good.

Quality Assurance processes continue to develop and evolve in line with national developments and principles. Messages and information are communicated clearly and on a regular basis to all employees. Generic, purposeful and effective support programmes are offered. Full and sector team meetings offer regular opportunities for collaboration, consultation and contributing to discussions and decisions regarding GwE's direction of work during a period of considerable change.

Performance Management and Accountability

The clear and robust accountability framework is a key strength in GwE. Detailed business plans on all levels of planning address all aspects of the work of GwE, and clearly note the contribution of the service to the transformation agenda. Plans are fully costed, with clear success criteria and milestones for delivering objectives.

There are detailed self-evaluation arrangements. Plans are reviewed on a quarterly basis, evaluating progress and impact. Staff on all levels fully understand their responsibility for continued improvement and accountability.

Each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser. Progress towards agreed outcomes on a local authority level is monitored on a quarterly basis and discussed regularly in meetings between the lead adviser and Local Authority. Ongoing issues are referred to GwE Senior leaders in a timely manner.

Self-evaluation is a strong feature in GwE and the self-evaluation process is cyclical and ongoing. Great emphasis is placed on accountability and continuous review, and there is consistent emphasis on progress in line with priorities. Consequently, GwE leaders accurately identify areas of good performance and areas for development, or areas where there is an element of risk in terms of improving experiences and educational outcomes for learners.

Value for Money

The consortium has effective financial management processes in place. Communication and consultation on financial arrangements is effective, and GwE staff, the host local authority and Joint Committee all review the core funding and grant expenditure on a regular basis.

A robust financial analysis supports the work of delivering the business plan. A medium term financial plan and workforce plan are both aligned with the business plan. Through increasingly effective use of data to identify key priorities, the link between the business planning process and decisions regarding financial planning is strengthened as the work streams that underpin the business plan clearly note the resources to be used.

A formal framework was produced to assess the wider value for money provided by GwE. The judgement is now consistent across all stakeholders on how to measure the value for money of GwE activities within the structure and objectives of the business plan.

Risk Register

There are rigorous and comprehensive arrangements in place to accurately identify and manage risks on a local, regional and national level. The risk register is a live document, which is updated on a regular basis in order to identify increasing risks or risks which are no longer deemed as high level. It is reviewed every month in a senior leadership meeting and the Management Board and the Joint Committee review the register on a quarterly basis.

Through effective management of risks to the region, GwE is able to support the region's objectives, make effective use of resources and meet the outcomes as intended.

8. BUSINESS PLAN PRIORITIES 2021-2022

The regional priorities and areas for improvement are based firmly on the findings of our internal self-evaluation processes, external reviews on our current practice and direction of travel, and through consultation with headteachers and the Local Authorities. The Business Plan also addresses Welsh Government and the Local Authorities strategic priorities that fall within the remit of the work of GwE.

Additionally, GwE will work in partnership with Local Authorities to support additional local priorities, as appropriate. It also takes into consideration the views and priorities of other middle tier partners such as Estyn, Qualifications Wales, WJEC, National Academy for Educational Leadership (NAEL), Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Education Workforce Council (EWC).

Our priorities are a combination of improving school provision, leadership and outcomes, as well as delivering the reform journey. Our approach to the reform journey has been integrated in all aspects of our work from the beginning. Not one element of the reform journey can stand alone. It is viewed from the need of learners and the baseline of individual schools and clusters to deliver change according to agreed expectations.

GwE has encouraged schools to collaborate through sharing practice and co-constructing areas that need improving and the challenges of the reform journey. We have invested in various cluster models and encouraged schools to find a range of appropriate partners to deliver improvement and changes. The region has also looked outward for good practice in terms of identifying effective peer review models as well as encouraging our schools to develop and evolve their own practice. GwE believe that peer engagement should closely complement the dimensions identified within the OECD publication *'What Makes a School a Learning Organisation'*.

Our focus is on support and on capacity-building for a self-improving system. Challenge Advisers have become 'Supporting Improvement Advisers' and this is more than a name change – it signals a determination to build trust with key stakeholders and to move away from a top-down approach to school improvement, developing a more long-term, supportive and sustainable strategy.

In partnership with stakeholders, GwE has developed a long-term supportive and sustainable strategy which is successfully building capacity across the region to meet the challenges of the wider reform. The integrated approach has focused on developing collaborative opportunities across clusters of schools. To further support schools, GwE has developed the concept of creating termly milestones through the information management system G6. These offer all schools an opportunity to reflect and through continuous professional dialogue with SIAs, activity and its impact along with identification of next steps are shared.

Professional learning will be central to ensuring that all school staff have the professional knowledge and skills to deliver on the education reforms that are well underway in Wales. Taking into consideration the system expectations and working in collaboration with partners, a clear framework for themes for professional learning has been identified for practitioners within schools.

Our **strategic priorities** for improvement for 2021-2022 are:

Our strategic objectives	
1.	Curriculum & Assessment - Supporting a national curriculum with equity & excellence at its core that sets high standards for all learners
2.	Developing a high-quality education profession - improving the teaching & learning in our schools
3.	Leadership - supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards. Includes future leadership & professional networks
4.	Strong & inclusive schools committed to excellence, equity & well-being

Our strategic objectives	
5.	Supporting a self improving system - supporting a system in which the education profession have the skills, capacity & agency to continually learn & improve their practice
6.	Business - ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business and operational support that provides value for money.

The four purposes as outlined in the *Curriculum for Wales* guidance 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 **regional priorities for 2021-22** are outlined below are aimed to support schools as they work towards those four purposes.

These priorities are supported by the service's detailed plans, outlining how and when the aspects of each priority will be delivered and setting expectations for the next steps in delivering the reform journey. Also, each Local Authority has a detailed business plan agreed upon by the head of service and the core adviser.

1. Curriculum & Assessment - Supporting a national curriculum with equity & excellence at its core that sets high standards for all learners

1.1 - 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.

2. Developing a high-quality education profession - improving the teaching & learning in our schools

2.1 - 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.

2.2 - 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.

3. Leadership - supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards. Includes future leadership & professional networks

3.1 - Leadership

- Ensure that all learning organisations have the leadership capacity at all levels to inspire, coach, support, share practice and collaborate at all levels to ensure all learners' achieve their potential.
- Ensure that the principles of distributive leaderships are embedded in all learning organisations across the region.

3. Leadership - supporting inspirational leaders working collaboratively to raise standards. Includes future leadership & professional networks
3.2 - 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.
4. Strong & inclusive schools - committed to excellence, equity & well-being
4.1 - 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 disproportionality affected by school closures.
4.2 - Parental support strategy ➤ Develop a parental support strategy to help parents and carers on how to best support their child's learning.
5. Supporting a self improving system - supporting a system in which the education profession have the skills, capacity & agency to continually learn & improve their practice
5.1 - 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.
5.2 - 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.
5.3 - 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.
6. Business
6.1 - Ensure that GwE has strong governance and effective business and operational support that provides value for money.



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