



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

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# National Coherence Group: terms of reference

The National Coherence Group will provide advice to the Cabinet Secretary for Education on proposed changes to the school improvement system in Wales.

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# Background

Following the commitment to review the roles and responsibilities of education partners in Wales, the National Coherence Group was established to provide advice to the Cabinet Secretary for Education on whether changes proposed to the school improvement system in Wales are coherent and robust.

## Terms of reference

### Context

The 'Review of the Roles and Responsibilities of Education Partners in Wales and School Improvement arrangements' was commissioned in July 2023, led by Professor Dylan Jones, supported by ISOS Partnership.

In December the review team updated the then Minister for Education and Welsh Language on their progress and the key emerging themes and findings, which highlighted consistent messages from school leaders and clear views from the majority of local authority partners. The feedback was clear on the preferred direction of travel that school leaders and a majority of local authorities wanted based around the following key elements:

- An opportunity to lead on school improvement matters through a greater focus on local collaboration and partnership working between school leaders and their Local Authority.
- Partnerships between more than one LA with a move away from a wider regional model of support.
- Stronger national leadership with clearer national priorities for schools.

Subsequently the Minister agreed that the next stage of the review's work would

focus on the detailed design and co-construction of revised school improvement arrangements. This approach was agreed by Cabinet on 15 January 2024 and announced in a **Written Statement** (<https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-next-stage-review-school-improvement-roles-and-responsibilities-education>) on 31 January. **This is the School Improvement Partnership Programme (the Programme).** (<https://www.gov.walesnull>)

In the current phase of the Programme, the Welsh Government has been working with education partners to design a simplified and streamlined approach to school support in Wales, following which the agreed system changes will be delivered (transition phase) and the benefits realised through longer term implementation (benefits phase).

## Purpose

The Written Statement included proposals for a National Coherence Group (NCG). The NCG will provide advice directly to the Cabinet Secretary for Education through the Group's Chair.

The NCG will support and connect the thinking of the Welsh Government, and strategic education partners including local authorities, regional consortia and partnerships, Estyn and the external partner team to move forward in an orderly way.

Specifically, the NCG will provide advice to the Cabinet Secretary for Education on the whether the totality of change for the Welsh Government, Estyn, local authorities and other partners is coherent and robust at a whole system level.

The NCG is also expected to have an ongoing role including oversight on the viability of proposed arrangements and the appropriateness of transition arrangements.

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## Responsibilities

The NCG will provide assurance and a critical sense-checking function across the full programme including its three main workstreams which focus on local, partnership, and national functions and structures to support the education system in future:

1. How school to school working can be best supported at local level by their local authority.
2. How school to school collaboration and networking can continue to be supported across local authorities.
3. How wider school improvement should best be led and supported at national level.

Sitting outside the hierarchical decision-making programme management structures, the NCG will be a vital part of the overall governance structure for the programme. The NCG will represent the education sector and sense check proposals for change which will be put forward for approval by the Cabinet Secretary for Education.

## Membership

Membership of the Group will be at a senior level to provide advice, challenge and programme assurance.

To enable the Group to operate effectively, members are expected to attend all meetings.

Membership will include representatives of the following organisations:

- local authority leaders

- local authority Chief Executive Officers
- Association of Directors of Education in Wales
- Estyn
- Welsh Local Government Association

Welsh Government policy officials will provide the secretariat for the NCG and attend in support as required.

Chair: Kirsty Williams CBE

Members:

- Councillor Darren Price, Leader of Carmarthenshire County Council
- Councillor Lis Burnett, Leader of Vale of Glamorgan Council
- Dafydd Gibbard, Chief Executive of Gwynedd Council
- Stephen Vickers, Chief Executive of Torfaen County Borough Council and Blaenau Gwent County Council
- Owen Evans, HMCI Estyn
- Dr Chris Llewellyn, Welsh Local Government Association
- Claire Homard, Association of Directors of Education in Wales

## Mode of operation

The NCG is expected to convene at least twice before the end of 2024 during phase 2 of the Programme. The NCG will continue to meet termly thereafter until September 2026 to monitor progress during the transition and benefits phases.

Meetings may be in person, online or a combination of both, depending on the availability and preference of its members.

Where it is not possible to convene the majority of members either in person or online, papers may be circulated for comment by email to seek feedback on

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proposals and policy development.

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