



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Integrated Impact Assessment Summary

Title of proposal:

Assessing the impact of decisions to allow all learners to return to schools/settings in September

Department:

Education Directorate

Cabinet Secretary/Minister responsible:

Minister for Education

Start Date:

June-August 2020

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What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?

1. Impact assessments for the education response to COVID-19

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented situation. In order to respond to and where possible mitigate a public health emergency, a series of significant, complex and difficult decisions had to be taken within compressed timescales.

This Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) focusses on assessing the impacts of allowing all learners to return to schools and settings in Wales from September 2020. This follows lockdown measures in March and the provision of 'check in, catch up, prepare' sessions in all schools and settings from 29 June. Due to capacity issues, this IIA has been collated in retrospect, however it refers to evidence and assessment of impacts that were considered by the Minister and policy officials prior to the [9 July announcement](#), and the development of the accompanying guidance, first published on 14 July and subsequently updated on 10 August.

This IIA links to another IIA covering the [initial education response](#) published on 1 October. It also builds on [the IIA published on 1 October](#) covering provision of 'check in, catch up, prepare' sessions.

For the purposes of these IIAs, the term 'schools and settings' includes maintained primary, secondary and special schools in Wales, as well as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and EOTAS settings. It should be noted that ongoing assessment of impacts covered in these IIAs include considerations for all children and young people of school age irrespective of how or where they receive learning.

2. Allowing all learners to return to schools and settings from September 2020

Since the decision to close schools and settings in March, our understanding of the virus and its longer-term impacts continues to develop. We know that we are going to have to live with the effects of COVID-19 for some time and that it remains our biggest challenge for the foreseeable future.

Creating the opportunity for learners to 'check in, catch up and prepare' in the summer term provided most learners with vital contact time before the summer holiday. This had important social, learning and attainment gap benefits in the short term given some of the negative effects of lockdown on learners (explored in greater detail in the IIA on the initial education response). This period also helped prepare learners for contact time after the summer holidays and allowed schools and settings to test and refine operations.

On 8 July, the Minister for Education announced an additional £29 million to schools to [recruit, recover and raise standards](#) to boost support for learners at crucial stages in their education from September. During the crisis, it has become clear that many learners have not progressed as much as they might in their learning, some having been impacted more seriously than others. This funding enables schools and settings to recruit and deploy additional staff to support learners in addressing their needs following the initial COVID-19 crisis and period of school closure.

Impact assessments undertaken in the summer term (referenced above) were key in shaping the [recruit, recover and raise standards](#) programme and its associated significant financial investment in support for targeted groups of learners. Those impact assessments provided the analysis to help identify the priority cohorts. That said, flexibility is built-in to the programme to allow schools and settings sufficient autonomy to identify groups or individuals that need support

as part of their individual school plans.

On 9 July the Education Minister announced that all learners would be able to return to school in September. This followed a [recommendation](#) from the Welsh Technical Advisory Group (TAG) that schools could plan to open in September with 100% of learners on site, subject to a continuing, steady decline in the presence of COVID-19.

As previously outlined, whilst this IIA has been collated retrospectively, the considerations and evidence explored in this IIA represents that which was presented to the minister and which helped inform decisions to allow 100% of learners to return in September. This announcement was followed on 13 July by the publication of operational and learning guidance, developed with the support of local authorities, head-teachers, public health officials, teaching unions and education practitioners.

As noted in the [last IIA](#) the [decision framework for the next phase of education and childcare: considerations, planning and challenges](#) published on 15 May set out the Minister for Education's approach to changing the operations of schools and other providers over time in response to COVID-19. It set out 5 key principles for the education sector in the next phase. These principles, alongside consideration of children's rights and related duties, continue to weigh up a number of factors as part of the decision-making process.

2.1 Well-being of learners and staff

The health and well-being of learners and staff has been the first principle for all decisions and [operational guidance for schools and settings](#) is clear that staff well-being should be of primary concern. It states that they need to consider the potential impacts on the health and well-being of staff and leaders, including work–life balance. In addition, although it is not possible to ensure a totally risk-free environment, the Office of National Statistics' analysis on COVID-19 related deaths linked to occupations suggests that staff in educational settings tend not to be at any greater risk from the disease than many other occupations. There is no evidence that children transmit the disease any more than adults, however we will continue to monitor rates of positive test results in children. At the time of drafting, there was a very low prevalence of positive tests among education workers at 3.8% cumulative, among the lowest rates of critical workers.

A wide range of evidence has been drawn upon to inform decisions, and this is referenced throughout this IIA. It recognises the adverse effects on well-being or access to learning arising from not going to school. Risks have to be carefully balanced with the negative health impacts of being out of school. Schools and settings are also an important point of contact for public health and safeguarding services that are critical to the well-being of children and families.

Welsh Government has not imposed a rigid formula for local level responses to the situation. It has provided a framework and guidance for schools / settings, local authorities and regions to use in developing plans, approaches and solutions their learners and local communities need. The guidance recognises that a school or setting's context will determine how the combination of measures are used to best effect to help minimise the risk of transmission in each individual setting. For some, it will be content that will be the main priority; for other learners it will be addressing emotional health and well-being. When phasing all learners back to schools and settings, local authorities working with the staff have been asked to consider how this impacts on learner well-being.

We know that the risk to children themselves of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 is very low. [Current evidence](#) points to infection with SARS-CoV-2 appearing to take a milder course in children than in adults: most infected children present with mild symptoms or are asymptomatic, and very few develop severe or life-threatening disease. There remains some on-going

uncertainty in transmissibility of the disease by children, but real-world observation of schools opening in other jurisdictions has shown little transmission by children. For example, a [recent report](#) by the Public Health Agency of Sweden found that “Children are not a major risk group of the COVID-19 disease and seem to play a less important role from the transmission point of view. The negative effects of closing schools must be weighed against the possible positive indirect effects it might have on the mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic”. In addition, our NHS Test, Trace, Protect system is operational and we are clear about the measures needed to create safer environments within schools and settings.

Schools and settings with their employers have been advised to thoroughly review their health and safety risk assessments in collaboration with the local authority and trade unions, and draw up plans that address the risks identified. Essential measures include formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise social and physical distancing between those in school wherever possible and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable. This will involve grouping learners and minimising contact between separate groups as much as possible.

The Welsh Government has expressed concern that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, with consequent adverse direct and indirect health outcomes. The First Minister convened a BAME COVID-19 Advisory Group to advise him and his Cabinet on this critical matter, to identify measures to protect communities in Wales and to recommend longer-term work that would be needed to address inequalities. The Socio-economic Sub-Group was set up specifically to identify the range of socioeconomic factors influencing adverse COVID-19 health and social care outcomes for individuals from BAME backgrounds.

Schools and settings will be alert to identify and support learners who exhibit signs of distress throughout the autumn. Pastoral care and bereavement support should be planned for and put in place. More detailed guidance on supporting well-being through learning is found in the [learning guidance](#). This encourages practitioners to focus on supporting learner well-being as the foundation for learning, and that all learners have access to a range of tools and support for their emotional and mental well-being at school.

In anticipation of increased demands of mental health resources, additional funding has been provided to support children's mental health, in addition to the investment made in counselling services and mental health support over the past year.

Evidence from organisations such as the NSPCC tells us that lockdown resulted in learners who are at risk of, or are experiencing abuse and neglect, being unknown to children's services. This highlights the important role that schools and settings normally play in the disclosure of safeguarding issues. Due to increasing operations, schools and settings have been better able to identify well-being needs, safeguarding issues, and any residual digital accessibility issues.

2.2 Contribution to the national effort

The Minister for Education highlighted as her second key principle in the decision framework the need to continue our contribution to the national effort and strategy to fight the spread of COVID-19.

Information on the education response continues to both draw from and inform the national effort across Wales, and in the UK. Welsh Government education officials remain engaged in internal cross-government considerations, including through: the TAC children and education sub-group; the 21 day review group; and the safeguarding and vulnerable children and young people work stream. We also maintain contact with colleagues in the other UK education jurisdictions, as well as reviewing approaches and results from other jurisdictions internationally.

Taking into account the improved situation over the summer, the balance of risk is overwhelmingly in favour of learners returning to their school or setting. Being out of school or settings is detrimental for a learner's cognitive and academic development and their health and well-being, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged children; and, can have an impact both in the short and longer term. We know that lower academic achievement also translates into long-term economic costs. We also know that school closures have affected some families' ability to work. Getting learners back to school as quickly and as safely as possible brings positive benefits on a number of fronts, not least their mental and emotional well-being.

2.3 Confidence of those involved

The Minister for Education's decision framework highlighted the confidence of parents / carers, staff and learners as the third principle. It noted that the basis of confidence would be evidence and information, for the purpose of being able to plan ahead. Therefore, how decisions are made, as well as the evidence for decisions, would draw on a range of expertise and evidence.

In addition to the wide range of evidence linked to throughout this IIA, regular discussion is taking place with the following groups for the purpose of agreeing approaches and informing advice on decisions:

- TAC: children and education subgroup – this includes a range of Welsh Government officials and expert advisors to provide evidence on the scientific and health factors and implications.
- Headteachers and leaders stakeholder group – a reference group of leads of schools and other providers from childcare through to university.
- Strategic Education Delivery Partners stakeholder group – providing reference from local authorities, regional consortia, Estyn, further education and Qualifications Wales.
- Governor support officers from local authorities and consortia, plus school governors.
- Diocesan Directors of Education
- Parent Advisory Group
- Trade Unions partnership.
- Colegau Cymru Principals' forum.
- Childcare and Play Stakeholder Reference Group – includes representation from the childcare and play sector, Care Inspectorate Wales, Estyn, local authorities, Social Care Wales and the Future Generations, Children's and Welsh Language Commissioners.

To seek the views of children and young people, Welsh Government is engaged with the Youth Parliament. Welsh Government also launched the '[Coronavirus and me](#)' online survey in partnership with the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Children in Wales and the Youth Parliament. The survey provided a snapshot over a two week period of the views of over 23,700 children and young people on a variety of issues relating to their health, education, social lives and their feelings through the COVID-19 crisis. The results have been published on the Children's Commissioner's website. These signals a range of different experiences since the outbreak of the pandemic. Some learners have experienced bereavement, distress and worry. Many have missed friends, families and feel they are missing out on their education. At the same time, many learners have described how they have valued a chance to spend more time with their family, to play and relax more, or to learn in a different way. More detail is contained in the Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA).

In addition, discussions with parents / carers are important to understand their and learners' experiences during this ongoing period of disruption. Additional support will be required for many, such as learners who are experiencing grief, learners with special educational needs (SEN) or other barriers to learning and those with existing mental health problems. Learners who may have been resilient and performing well before lockdown may have been equally affected

during this period and need additional support for their well-being and/or learning on return.

It remains essential that direct and indirect [communications](#) regarding both learner and parental expectations are clear and consistent throughout this ongoing period of education disruption.

The announcement on the reopening in September for all learners was welcomed by the Senedd's Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee, who recognise that whilst school closure was a necessary part of controlling the pandemic, that the impact of not being at school on the well-being of very many children was significant.

2.4 Ability to prioritise

The introduction of 'check-in, catch-up and prepare' sessions in the 2019/20 summer term started a process of mitigating impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions introduced in March. However, it is clear that learning and teaching will continue to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2020/21 school year. The approaches taken by schools and settings will continue to evolve to provide learning both in school and elsewhere if the needs arises and to mitigate barriers some learner groups may face.

Consideration of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) alongside our well-being goals has highlighted the vital role that our schools and settings have in addressing the needs of every learner. No one can be left behind. Nevertheless, for some with specific learning and developmental needs equity of opportunity can only be realised through additional targeted support. Making sure that all our learners are in a position to learn and to re-engage with their education is a key focus for the autumn term, and ensuring that learner health and well-being is met is critical to making this happen.

It is recognised that face to face contact between learners and schools prior to the summer break, has been mixed. Blended learning will undoubtedly continue to play a part in Welsh education in a number of ways. Welsh Government continues to work with partners such as regional education consortia and Estyn to ensure that the good practice that exists across many schools and settings in Wales continues to be shared, helping to inform operations for the future.

The additional £29 million being provided to support the [Recruit Recover and Raise Standards: Accelerating Learning Programme](#), is to enable them to support learners in addressing their needs following the initial COVID-19 crisis and period of school closure through recruiting and deploying additional human capacity.

All learners are eligible for additional help when they return to school in September, although the scope of the help needed will vary significantly depending on individual circumstances. The funding is to be targeted at specific cohorts identified (including through earlier education impact assessments) as most at risk as follows:

- Learners preparing for examinations in the forthcoming academic year (that is those in years 11, 12 and 13)
- Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, as defined by a range of approaches
- Year 7, because of the disruption to the transition from primary to secondary schools.

These specific cohorts are an indication of how headteachers will think about the deployment of support. The expectation is that, although the funding formula is based on specific learner cohorts, learners who are identified as in need of support are given the opportunity to engage with support where possible. It is therefore not reserved exclusively for the use of the three priority groups listed above and can be used to enable access to support where needed for learners who have been impacted by a wide range of aspects of the pandemic. As there will be individuals not in the 3 listed priority groups who also need support, it is an important principle

that headteachers have autonomy in deciding any further groups or individuals that they support as part of their individual school plans.

[Supplementary guidance](#) has also been published with additional information, beyond the operational and learning guidance, which is specific to supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of learners in the new academic year. This will support schools and settings to ensure an inclusive approach as they prepare for full operation from September 2020.

[Learning guidance](#) is clear that schools and settings should have particular regard to meeting the needs of those unable to attend their school or setting. If a learner is unable to attend school for any reason it is vital the school continues to engage regularly with the learner remotely. Schools and settings should keep a record of attendance and families should notify their school and explain the reason for non-attendance to enable the school to record attendance correctly. This will help schools, settings and local authorities plan for, and understand any barriers to, learners returning to school and identify any further support needed. It will be critical that all learners engage and any concerns about engagement, or the welfare of a learner, are followed up immediately by the school or setting. Concerns should only be escalated to the Education Welfare Service after the school has made every attempt to engage the family.

2.5 Consistency with the Welsh Government's framework

In reaching the decision to allow 100% of learners to return to schools and settings in September, advice has drawn from and remained consistent with the Welsh Government's framework for decision-making.

For example, through the publication of [operational guidance](#) we have ensured that guidance is in place to support measures such as distancing, managing attendance and wider protective actions in schools and settings. Welsh Government has also published a range of wider guidance and support materials relating to COVID-19 which is being drawn on as necessary; alongside the scientific and health information being drawn on.

The Welsh Government has also signalled that increasing operations in schools and settings is a priority when considering the whole response to managing the pandemic.

3. The legislative response

In considering how to support the decisions to allow all learners to return to school from September, we made some temporary modifications to legislation:

1. *The Education (Notification of School Term Dates) (Wales) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020*

A relaxation of the requirement for local authorities to notify Welsh Ministers of their term dates for 2022/23 by the final working day in December 2020 (instead of the final working day in August 2020) was considered appropriate. This was due to the restricted operation of schools necessitated by the pandemic and the significant pressure local authorities are facing, meaning that complying with the original 31 August deadline would place a disproportionate administrative burden on them at a time when they are already stretched.

2. *The Disapplication of Changing School Session Times Requirements (Wales) Notice 2020*

The Changing of School Session Times (Wales) Regulations 2009 set out the procedure school governing bodies and local authorities must follow to make changes to their school start and finish times and break times. This includes consulting producing a statement, holding a meeting

with parents and considering any written determination. They also provide that such changes can only occur at the beginning of a term or a beginning of a school year (depending on the proposal). The notice temporarily disapplies regulations 3 and 4 of the Changing of School Session Times (Wales) Regulations 2009, to enable changes to school session times without the need for consultation or giving notice. This temporary disapplication only applies to changes to session times made due to the incidence of coronavirus and any changes made whilst the notice has effect will not be permanent. This notice has been issued three times, covering the periods at the end of summer term 2019/20 and September and October of autumn term 2020/21. The notices are reviewed and considered for re-issue each month.

3. The Education (School Day and School Year)(Wales)(Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020

Schools that opened for an additional week in 2019/20 will close for an extended autumn half term break in 2021/20 meaning they will be unable to comply with the requirements set out in the Education (School Day and School Year) (Wales) Regulations 2003 which stipulate how many sessions a school must deliver in any given year. In addition, to help prepare to accommodate all learners back in school, schools may take up to two days at the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year as planning and preparation days. Effectively, this leaves those schools four sessions short of the requirement. This one-off amendment to the Regulations is intended to help schools and local authorities to increase their operations without breaching their statutory requirements in respect of the number of sessions delivered.

3. The next phase

In taking forward our response to the public health crisis, we remain mindful of the social, developmental and well-being impacts of extended periods of educational disruption. Nevertheless, we are likely to experience some disruption in education provision in schools and settings for some time. A range of actions have, therefore, been put in place to monitor the impacts associated with the ongoing disruption to learning and to inform decision making going forward.

Research has been commissioned to understand the longer-term implications and how we can address them, with consideration of how learners can be engaged in the process. We are working with stakeholders such as Estyn, local authorities, regional education consortia and trade unions to understand the implications of the blended learning approaches. We are also drawing on experience from outside of Wales to inform our approaches.

Multi-channel communications approaches continue to be employed to ensure, as far as is possible, those involved or affected by increasing operations in schools and settings have access to the right information, and expectations are clear.

A range of real time engagement arrangements are in place or being considered to gather feedback on the impact of these policies. These include daily social media listening reports and daily summaries of key issues coming through via correspondence and enquiries to our first point of contact centre. As well as further parental and learner surveys.

The Senedd's ongoing scrutiny of the Welsh Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic includes an open [call for evidence](#) from the Children, Young People and Education Committee. The publication of resulting information provides a source of inputs to help inform forward decision making and actions.

Curriculum reform remains our central priority for education in Wales. As such, the foci of the [Recruit Recover and Raise Standards: Accelerating Learning Programme](#) are:

- literacy, numeracy and digital competence within a broad and balanced curriculum – for the examination years, this will include higher order reading and writing skills, high level mathematics where relevant, and digital competence at the appropriate level and as relevant to learners progressing with their qualifications
- the development of independent learning skills, to enable and motivate learners in all groups to make accelerated progress by working more effectively alone and out of school
- support and engagement through coaching – this in recognition that the most disengaged learners will need coaching and emotional support as well as support for examination preparation and skills.

The provision of such a large amount of additional funding dictates we all ensure that the resources are deployed well and have the required impact. Local authorities will be required to:

- ensure that schools set out what they intend to do with the resources in a simple and clear plan
- indicate the number of learners included and an outline of the curriculum and staffing solutions proposed
- agree plans with the school's Challenge Advisor (in the case of schools currently designated as requiring red and amber levels of support from their regional educational consortia)
- gain the school's Governing Body sign off to the plan and ensure details of the school's approach is made available to parents and the wider community.

This information, along with information provided by regional consortia, will be used to monitor the use and impact of the additional funding.

This IIA is being kept under review and will most likely be updated again, particularly as the impact of policy decisions becomes clearer, new evidence becomes available, or policies are reviewed and adapted. While the impact of decisions has been assessed as far as possible, the situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and associated decisions remain unprecedented. There may be unintended consequences which are identified later.

Conclusion

1. How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

The safety and mental, emotional and physical well-being of learners and staff has been set out at the first key principle for decisions regarding this next phase of the education response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Allowing all learners to return to schools and settings includes, therefore, a process of ongoing engagement with practitioners and learners, as well as a wide range of interested parties. Schools and settings, by their very nature, impact widely in society. This process includes engagement with:

- **children and young people** – directly through the ‘[coronavirus and me](#)’ survey, but also indirectly through engagement with parent / carer and practitioner groups who are able to speak to learner experiences, although this survey is not representative of all children and young people across Wales
- **education practitioners** – directly through stakeholder reference advisory groups and informal networks developed through the process of education reforms over recent years, but also indirectly through engagement with local authorities, Estyn, Regional Consortia and trade unions who are able to speak to practitioner experiences
- **parents / carers** – directly through the Parent Advisory Group (including analysis of the group’s survey findings regarding the decision framework), and well as more indirect analysis of wider parental surveys (such as that undertaken by ParentKind) and correspondence / enquiries submitted to the first point of contact centre
- **education stakeholders**, such as local authorities, Estyn, regional consortia, trade unions and others.

It is important that this direct engagement, particularly with learners and parents / carers is built on over the coming months, with mechanisms to test thinking and capture their experiences as we move through the academic year.

Those representing children’s rights should be directly engaged in the pandemic response stakeholder groups.

2. What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

In respect of applying a rights-based approach to equity in making available the opportunity for all learners to return to their school or setting from September the direct impacts are as yet unknown. However, certain judgements have been made, informed by evidence from a range of sources:

- Some learners have expressed positive **experiences** during education restrictions (such as spending more time with families, time outdoors and learning new skills). However, some learners may have developed anxiety or other mental health issues as a result of the impacts of COVID-19. In addition, COVID-19 is likely to have increased or exacerbated pre-existing anxiety and other mental health issues. Vulnerable and disadvantaged learners who are experiencing anxiety or other mental health issues may be reluctant to return, or become increasingly anxious about returning, to their school or setting as a result of their attendance being disrupted. Generally, however, we anticipate learner and staff experiences will not be great when compared with normal schooling pre-pandemic. There will be an ongoing period of uncertainty with the potential for local

restrictions to return. This in itself will likely present challenges through the autumn term, particularly as learner motivation fluctuates. It is recognised the different experiences learners will have had at home, and with their families, will play a large part in how easily they adapt to attending their school or setting.

- The rights-based **approach of equity** being applied is important as all learners need ongoing direct support from their schools and settings. Not having that could mean significant learning loss for some. However, providing direct support for all means that time with those most in need could be restricted – hence the introduction and targeting of additional support through the Recruit, Retain and Raise Standards programme. Nevertheless, potentially not all learners will immediately get what they need from contact time available from September – this may take time to address in specific circumstances. However, the approach takes great steps in the right direction, and is helpful in continuing to address children’s rights. It is recognised, however, that the learning experience may not be as positive as pre-COVID-19 education provision for some time. It is also recognised that a principle of equity doesn’t equate to equality of opportunity or equality of provision without additional measures and considerations for specific needs and learners.
- The emphasis placed on learner and staff **health and well-being** is essential in addressing children’s rights. The return to schools and settings will facilitate better analysis of need – with, for example, resulting benefits for those with SEN or safeguarding issues. Some improvements to learner motivation to engage in learning is expected from facing school staff again, though there will be challenges to maintain this throughout the autumn period. The policy approach also responds to the desire to engage with staff and peers again expressed by children and young people through surveys. Access for those with SEN requires specific considerations, and while more challenging to address during a period of potential ongoing localised restrictions, it is essential that individual needs are identified and addressed.
- The approaches to and **engagement with learning** will have varied considerably across Wales. Returning to schools and settings provides more space for education professionals to assess learning needs and start the process of addressing them. Evidence suggests that under certain conditions blended learning can be as effective as full-time class-based provision, however it will take time for blended learning approaches to be developed to that level, and it must be recognised that for some learners it never will be as effective. Maintaining momentum, wide-ranging support, and ongoing analysis of progress will be essential for those engaged in blended learning in particular.
- It is likely that we will see disproportionate impacts on vulnerable and **disadvantaged learners** including regarding the issue of learning loss. Some learners will need reassurance about the return to their school or setting because of health concerns associated with COVID-19, as well as those who will need reassurance and/or support to return to school because they have become disconnected from their education. This is particularly so given the notable increase in eFSM support during the summer term (37% more than January). Schools and settings will need to carefully plan their provision, including the Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards support.
- There is potential for an increase in **challenging behaviour** amongst learners, particularly those who were finding it difficult to engage with education before COVID-19. They may struggle to adapt to the change in routine, including the more structured routines and expectations in relation to learning and behaviour, on a return to education. In particular EOTAS provision is diverse and includes both academic and vocational education. COVID-19 presented significant challenges for some types of EOTAS settings to provide resources for learners to learn from home due to the practical nature of their education. Local authorities would have faced considerable challenges in finding

alternative education placements for learners during the outbreak and it is likely these learners will have experienced an interruption to their education.

- Impacts on **Welsh language** development will become clearer as schools and settings are better able to assess learner progress. Potential impacts on Welsh language immersion provision in the early years, as well as access to wider learning through the medium of Welsh, are being highlighted in impact assessments. One area that will need to be considered as part of this will be support for parents, including those who do not speak Welsh. There may also be particular issues relating to travel for those attending Welsh-medium provision, impacting their ability to attend their school. The situation regarding Welsh language learning and, separately, learning through the medium of Welsh requires further ongoing monitoring through the autumn.
- The ongoing disruption to schools and settings will continue to have impact on **parents'** ability to work and/or engage in their communities, particularly in cases of localised restrictions or closures. This will also depend on individual circumstances, as many parents are trying to fit employment commitments around their caring responsibilities, and will have different demands from employers. This is particularly so where access to informal care networks remains restricted by social-distancing measures. Ongoing periods of blended learning will prove difficult for some families to manage.
- **Communications** with learners, as well as parents / carers, both directly and indirectly (via schools, settings and other education stakeholders) need to remain ongoing and two-way. Many learners are sufficiently competent to make informed judgements about their learning and/or influence parental decision making. They should have the opportunity to directly inform thinking about the next phases of operations. All need to be informed about the importance of staying safe and engaging in their learning. There also needs to be a broader understanding of expectations, and that education will not return to normal for some time.

3. In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,
- avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

Allowing 100% of learners to return to their schools and settings is a big step towards addressing impacts arising from the disruption to education arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. However, further ongoing disruption is inevitable as we continue to live with the virus. The decision framework set out in Section 1 of this IIA highlights the emphasis being placed on the 5 key principles for this next phase of operations; each of which relate to the well-being goals.

- The **safety and mental, emotional and physical well-being** of learners and staff in schools and settings has been set out as one of the key principles behind any decisions regarding increasing operations in schools and settings. Detailed guidance has been provided to schools and settings regarding operational means through which we can keep education safe. Guidance has also emphasised the need for learner well-being to be prioritised as a pre-requisite to learning. This guidance is being kept under review and will be updated.
- The nature of applying a **rights-based approach to equity** in increasing activity in schools and settings for all learners is such that it is designed to mitigate the negative impacts associated with lockdown. It should support learners of all ages in terms of both

their well-being and learning needs. Guidance for schools and settings allows them to make decisions about which learners may need additional / specific support.

- Schools and settings can act as a focal **point in communities**. While social distancing remains this can be limited. However, it is expected that re-opening schools and settings for all learners in September will incrementally support community cohesion as more people are able to meet around the school or setting (while respecting social distancing rules) and catch up, offer advice and support.
- Impacts on **cultural well-being** arising from restrictions on people, businesses and communities during lockdown (which prevented participation in some cultural activities, arts, sports and recreation) is expected to start to be mitigated incrementally as learners increase their time accessing learning and support in schools and settings from September. However, as noted above, there remains the potential for impact on the Welsh language as a consequence of educational disruption. Guidance is clear that the issues surrounding learning the Welsh language, and learning through Welsh will need close monitoring, ongoing research, evidence and action going forward. Given the impacts explored above however, it is anticipated that some learners will need additional support with Welsh from the autumn term.

The close working relationships with and between Wales' education stakeholders, which have developed further through work taking forward *Our National Mission* education reforms, have provided a firm foundation for the rapid action that has been necessary over recent months. They will remain essential as we move into this next phase of increasing operations in schools and settings.

The overwhelmingly positive response from practitioners across Wales in supporting the needs of our children and young people has been fully recognised; as has the demands of sustaining rapid collaborative arrangements with key agencies and interest groups. Going forward, we will need to remain mindful of how we can support the capacity of the education sector to respond to the ongoing demands arising from this health crisis, particularly as the demands on our education professionals will increase exponentially as more learners return to their school or settings in a COVID-19 environment.

4. How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

The *IIA covering the initial education response* to COVID-19 published on 1 October contains detailed information on arrangements in place regarding the monitoring and evaluation of the education response to the pandemic. Welsh Government also continues to capture, analyse and make available information on the health and wider impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to those wide ranging approaches, specific information, feedback and ongoing review is needed with regard to:

- learners' experiences of 'check in, catch up, prepare' sessions and their views regarding learning approaches in the autumn
- the views of parents / carers regarding the arrangements for increasing operations in schools and settings (including well-being, learning and logistical / transport issues)
- evidence on the impacts of COVID-19 on those BAME, and how guidance for schools and settings should be revised accordingly
- lessons learnt from the provision of learning remotely over recent months, and how that can support blended approaches into the autumn

- the engagement and challenges in taking forward both Welsh language learning, and learning through the medium of Welsh
- engagement at 'check in, catch up, prepare' sessions, with particular regard to meeting the needs of disadvantaged learners, and those vulnerable to COVID-19 who are unable to attend contact sessions
- how the specific needs of those with SEN are being identified and addressed during a period of ongoing educational disruption
- how the specific needs of EOTAS learners are being identified and addressed during a period of ongoing educational disruption

In conjunction with that set out in the IIA on the initial education response, the evidence base is supplemented by information from regular contact with the other UK education departments, as well as regular information and analysis on approaches being taken in response to COVID-19 in other education jurisdictions internationally.

Collectively, this evidence base will allow us to review and revise policies, to identify further evidence gaps and to consider further mitigating action that is necessary for those who have been most adversely affected. This IIA will, therefore, remain 'live' with ongoing review and periodic updates as the impact of thinking and decision making on increasing operations in schools and settings is assessed through the autumn.

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn
Gymraeg. This document is also
available in Welsh.