

17/12/2025

Dear

ATISN 26425 – Seren Academy Programme and Free School Meals.

Thank you for your request which I received on 28/11/2025. You asked for:

Information held on learners on The Seren Academy programme broken down into each of the Welsh regions covered for learners in school years 12 & 13.

- 1) In the academic years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 how many 6th form students in Wales have been eligible/invited to join the Seren programme / Academy?
- 2) In each of the academic years listed above how many of the eligible/invited students were in receipt of free school meals?
- 3) How many of the total eligible/invited students (for the above academic years) actually took part / engaged in the programme, how many of these were in receipt of free school meals and what criteria does the Seren programme / Academy use to measure uptake/engagement with the programme?
- 4) What steps has the Seren programme / Academy taken to ensure more disadvantaged students, if invited, take up the programme.
- 5) What steps are the Welsh Government taking to ensure widening access to higher education for those who are in receipt of free school meals?
- 6) How much money does the Welsh Government spend on the Seren programme / Academy per annum and how does this equate to the money spent per student who engaged?
- 7) How much is spent paying mentors per annum to support Seren Programme students, what proportion of these mentors are students and what proportion are working professionals.

Our response

The information you requested is enclosed.

- 1. In the academic years 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 how many 6th form students in Wales have been eligible/invited to join the Seren programme / Academy?**

Schools and colleges are invited to create their Seren cohort based on the eligibility criteria. [Eligibility Criteria - Hwb](#).

The centres are provided with a Seren registration pack that provides all the bilingual materials to invite the learners to be part of the programme. The numbers invited to join aren't shared with Welsh Government.

The learners invited by their centre are only known to the Seren Academy once the learner registers via the online portal. The online portal was launched in academic year 2023 – 24.

We can however share the number of learners in Year 12 and 13 who are **registered** with the Seren Academy from 2023-24 onwards:

	Yr12	Yr13
2023-2024	2,877	2,788
2024-2025	2607	2871
2025-2026 (as of 2/12/25)	2439	2599

2. In each of the academic years listed above how many of the eligible/invited students were in receipt of free school meals?

Since the introduction of the online portal, the following number of learners have declared receipt of FSM or EMA since academic year 23-24.

	Yr12 FSM / EMA	Yr13 FSM / EMA
2023 – 2023	250 / 375	207 / 259
2024 – 2025	224 / 289	254 / 369
2025 – 2026 (2 December 2025))	215 / 285	219 / 283

3. How many of the total eligible/invited students (for the above academic years) actually took part / engaged in the programme, how many of these were in receipt of free school meals and what criteria does the Seren programme / Academy use to measure uptake/engagement with the programme?

All registered learners participate in the programme. See numbers above for the learners who have **declared** they are in receipt of FSM/EMA in line with when Seren began collecting their personal data via the online portal.

4. What steps has the Seren programme / Academy taken to ensure more disadvantaged students, if invited, take up the programme?

In 2023, The Seren Academy commissioned a report on breaking down barriers to access and participation in The Seren Academy. The research was conducted with three target audiences of parents, teachers and learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. The *Seren Focus Group Report on Supporting Disadvantaged Learners* identified seven areas to enhance engagement with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Here are the identified barriers and the actions taken to date.

Barrier 1: Disadvantage attainment gap and Seren eligibility

Poor attainment scores do not reflect the potential of learners from low-income backgrounds. Many disadvantaged learners show the potential and motivation to benefit from Seren to overcome barriers and encourage them to aim high.

Action: The learner eligibility criterion now includes flexibility for teachers to create their own Seren cohort in year 7,8 and 9 giving them the freedom to include those with high attainment as well as those with high potential of attainment if exposed to the Seren Academy.

Further research is underway to inform our ongoing approach to identifying Seren learners. This research will consider learners from all backgrounds and circumstances to understand barriers to engage with the Seren Academy. This will then inform guidance for Seren leads at schools and colleges to understand what provision is within the education system in Wales to mitigate these barriers. For example, how the pupil development grant can support learners from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Barrier 2: Transport cost and accessibility

Learners are struggling to attend university open days and outreach programmes due to the cost and accessibility of travel.

Action: All transport required for the participation in Seren is fully funded.

Barrier 3: Access to Digital Devices

High potential disadvantaged young people are three times more likely to lack a suitable device to study at home^[1].

Action: The delivery programme includes an increased range of flexibility for schools and colleges to deliver interventions during the school day where learners can use school/college devices. As Seren is building relationships with schools and colleges, they can identify when there is a need for a learner in this circumstance and provide the necessary scaffolding.

Barrier 4: Scheduling of events

Disadvantaged young people are more likely than their peers to have competing priorities relating to part-time jobs and caring responsibilities. They are more likely to struggle to attend and engage with Seren provision outside of school hours.

Action: The delivery programme includes an increased range of flexibility for schools and colleges to deliver interventions during the school day and/or that learners can pursue independently. The first stage of the delivery programme promotes flexible delivery with teacher facilitation to ensure learners can be guided and supported to engage fully and proactively with the range of Seren activities. Across the stages, a range of delivery formats are used in The Seren Academy programme, including online, in-person, short masterclasses, small-group seminars, prior and further reading and competitions. Our online delivery programme now includes a range of pre-recorded and live events (which are also recorded) to provide learners with flexibility of when to engage in interventions.

Barrier 5: Breadth of Seren Provision

Greater information and support are required relating to degree apprenticeships and student finance. Provide access to opportunities relating to their educational goals and aspirations.

Action: A pathway to degree apprenticeships is currently being scoped for Seren learners. There are interventions in the programme to signpost learners and provide the information and guidance on the choices they have for their future educational pathway so they can make informed decisions. The masterclasses, seminars and competitions within the delivery programme reflect a range of subject pathways. A glossary of student finance, bursaries and scholarships has been shared with Seren learners. This glossary provides information on where to find further details on student finance, scholarships and bursaries to support learners who might be discouraged from applying to universities due to financial constraints.

Barrier 6: Teacher Resource and Guidance

Teachers had varying levels of awareness of the opportunities available to their students and struggled to find time during the school day to support Seren learners.

Action: In May 2025, the Cabinet Secretary for Education announced a new Seren Academy delivery model to ensure an equal and consistent offer of opportunities for all Seren learners across Wales, including a new school and college support package. This package will include guidance for teachers and tutors to best support their Seren learners. Seren officials are currently working with representative practitioners from across Wales to inform the package in preparation for it to be in place for academic year 26-27.

Barrier 7: Parental Engagement

Low level awareness of what Seren is and how they can support.

Action: There are now termly engagement sessions with all Seren parents. A new engagement programme for parents is currently being scoped working with parents of Seren alumni. A new parental engagement plan is being developed with Seren alumni parents and practitioners to ensure consistent engagement across Wales under the new delivery model.

5. What steps are the Welsh Government taking to ensure widening access to higher education for those who are in receipt of free school meals?

The information required is publicly available from the Welsh Government and Medr.

6. How much money does the Welsh Government spend on the Seren programme / Academy per annum and how does this equate to the money spent per student who engaged?

24-25	23-24	22-23	21-22	20-21
£1,817,000	£2,655,000	£2,655,000	£2,655,000	£1,227,000

We can report in 2024-25, the Seren Academy budget was £1,817,000. The Seren Academy is a programme and therefore this budget covers all programme costs

including staff and delivery. In the same academic year, it was reported by the Seren Hubs (grant funded via local authorities and an FE college) that there were approximately 24,000 learners who participated with the Seren Academy from Year 8 to 13.

Based on hub reported figures, for academic year 2024-2025, £75.70 was spent per learner who engaged.

7. How much is spent paying mentors per annum to support Seren Programme students, what proportion of these mentors are students and what proportion are working professionals?

The year 12&13 Seren mentoring programme in academic year 2024-25 provided 630 mentoring sessions, by 54 mentors costing a total of £9,450. All mentors are paid directly and individually not via any third-party organisation. From the 54 mentors, 27 are Seren alumni.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ
or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely