# Evaluation of Recruit, Recover, and Raise Standards Programme

## Executive Summary (Schools)

1. This executive summary presents the evaluation findings for RRRS in schools only. For findings for early education in schools and childcare settings, including the additional £13m EIG administered grant, please see the associated 3-7 executive summary and the main report.

2. The Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards (RRRS) Programme was launched in August 2020 to support schools by increasing staff capacity. This additional capacity was designed to provide additional temporary support for priority learners aged 3-16 years to enable them to re-engage with the school system, achieve the progression that they are entitled to, and rebuild confidence and learning capability. £59m was distributed in 2020/21, including £3m in March 2021 for childcare settings. By July 2022 £165.5m has been distributed.

3. The overarching aim of this evaluation was to provide evidence to inform decisions about the ongoing response of the Welsh Government in supporting schools and childcare settings to recover from the disruptive impacts of COVID-19 on learners.

**Recommendations**

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| a. | Continue to focus on addressing need, as defined at a school level in combination with national level priorities. |
| b. | Continue to allow flexible delivery at the school level to address needs in an effective way with the additional capacity available. |
| c. | Continue to use the clear style of guidance. |
| d. | Provide schools with more information in advance to enable them to plan longer term. |
| e. | Link more closely with other initiatives to increase staff numbers. For example, programmes that support entry into the workforces of the childcare and school sectors. |
| f. | Actively encourage collaboration and cluster working between schools |
| g. | Explore the possibility of establishing a minimum grant allocation. |
| h. | Consider additional weighting on grant calculations for the rurality of settings. |
| i. | Consider using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation instead of FSM as a measure of need. |
| j. | Establish a national framework for use as a tool for consistent assessment of local needs outside of the priority cohorts. |
| k. | Introduce universal monitoring for schools and childcare settings of the amount of additional capacity, recorded as FTE, number of staff, and area of learning they are deployed to. |

**Methodology**

4. The evaluation of the RRRS for learners aged 3-16 years was conducted alongside the evaluation of the additional EIG administered £13m for early education. More detailed information on the methodology is available in section 3.

5. A literature review and fieldwork, consisting mostly of qualitative one-on-one interviews, was carried out over two phases. School stakeholders included:

   - 39 head teachers
   - 29 other stakeholders

6. The evaluation also analysed monitoring data from a survey distributed by Welsh Government to all schools.

**Limitations**

7.  The findings of this evaluation are derived heavily from qualitative research and as such the sample sizes for some contextual factors are small. Welsh medium and bilingual settings have been conflated by this research to ensure representation of Welsh medium education across other factors, including amount of funding received.

**What works**

8.  Funding and resources should be targeted towards specific groups of more disadvantaged learners and their learning needs. This is because learners with diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds and those from historically marginalised communities are less likely to receive the support they need at home.

9.  Effective strategies consist of acceleration (focusing on teaching only what must be learned, at a given level, with an emphasis on skills to access knowledge), micro-teaching (focusing on small groups, with learning occurring in small chunks in a short timeframe),and tutoring (one-on-one or small group, tutoring can be considered an example of micro-teaching).

10. Education systems need up-to-date, high-quality information on learning and learner wellbeing to enable the agile, effective targeting of support.

11. Attention to the education workforce has been found to be an important part of strong education systems and is forming a key element of many European nations' responses to pandemic disruption. It is also important to make sure teachers and staff are supported in developing and maintaining relationships with families and learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Approaches in other UK nations

12. England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland challenges similar to Wales with the limited availability of (potential) practitioners.

    - England focused on teaching quality and time in education for learners. Extra funding was provided for teacher training and

alongside a Catch Up Premium for all learners, and a Recovery Premium linked to the Pupil Premium for disadvantaged learners.

- Northern Ireland increased the employment of supply teachers, providing small group tuition through the Engage Programme and focused on emotional health and wellbeing.
- Scotland provided funding for additional support and teaching staff, supported wellbeing support in schools, and the pre-existing Scottish Attainment Challenge came to include Covid recovery elements.

**Theory of Change**

13. The overall Theory of Change (ToC Section 5) is sound on a national level with agreement across all stakeholders that the RRRS programme correctly identifies and tackles the needs with appropriate action to achieve useful objectives.

**Findings**

Relationship with other support packages

14. Whilst there are examples of individual grants working well alongside RRRS (6.1.2) they are not fully coordinated in their roll out and aims in the experiences of childcare and school staff.

Distribution

15. The distribution of the RRRS grant has been determined by the allocation criteria (see 1.1.2), going directly to schools, often with little interaction with the LA. Regarding the funding allocations, some of the schools interviewed were critical of using the percentage of free school meals as a determinant of how much funding a school should receive, due to the effects of the cost of living crisis and the roll out of universal FSM (see 6.2.4).

Advice and support from LAs

16. Many LAs provided school settings with broad guidance and advice on how to use funding, which was in line with Welsh Government guidance. The LAs

were generally flexible in their advising approach, depending on a school's particular circumstance.

17.     Further advice and support were provided by some LAs through the facilitation of initial meetings as well as through continuous communications with school settings. From other LAs, schools received limited advice, support, or additional guidance regarding the use of the RRRS funding received.

Role of partners

18.     Schools had mixed experiences with Regional Consortia/partnerships. Some Regional Consortia and education partnerships were heavily involved with LAs and schools, and able to facilitate the sharing of ideas and best practice. Others found it difficult to elicit support from Regional Consortia/partnerships. There has likely been a missed opportunity for Regional Consortia and partnerships to add value and increase the effectiveness of the grants.

19.     Partners were critical of the lead time taken between announcements of funding and their roll out, highlighting the difficulties of recruiting staff in a short timeframe.

Additional capacity and how funding has been used

20.     An estimated 2,452 FTE staff in schools have been funded by RRRS.[1] The majority of these positions have been support staff (62.2 per cent) followed by teachers (29.9 per cent). On average schools have gained a full-time equivalent support staff member (1.05 FTE) (TA, LSA, HLTA, and others) and half a full-time equivalent teacher (0.5 FTE). There is some slight variation in Welsh medium schools and PRUs (1 FTE teacher per 1.5 FTE support staff) and special schools (1 FTE teacher per 4.05 FTE support staff) (see section 6.5.1).

21.     Schools have commonly used RRRS to increase the hours worked by existing staff on part-time contracts. RRRS does not appear to have been

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[1] 1657 FTE employed amongst the 993 schools who returned the monitoring survey. This number has been proportionately increased to estimate for 1470 schools in Wales.

used to simply fund the direct use of supply teachers. The additional capacity created by RRRS has utilised the supply teacher workforce as a source of trained staff (6.5.4). The most common interventions by RRRS in schools has been for literacy and wellbeing, often delivered in a short period of time (e.g. over one term).

22. Indirect approaches have been used for RRRS. The capacity generated by RRRS has enabled more flexibility in how staff resources are deployed. For example, in secondary schools, existing staff with more experience have been utilised to support years 10 and 11 whilst RRRS funding has paid for staff to work with year 8.

Decision making

23. Decisions around funding allocations have been primarily guided by the needs of learners with the lead element being schools' own knowledge of their learners. The availability of staff who can deliver against these needs has been a main factor in the form of additional support provided.

24. Collaboration between schools has been limited. Some LAs have taken a lead when it comes to coordinating and planning with headteachers and Regional Consortia/partnerships, though LA stakeholders expressed frustration at the 'last-minute' pace of coordination particularly with Regional Consortia/partnerships. Now that the need for classes to work in bubbles has gone, there is a growing desire for greater collaboration and pooling of resources.

Enablers and barriers

25. Key enablers are:

- The opportunity for extra pay available to experienced staff who work additional hours, and already have relationships with children and other staff.
- Pre-pandemic relationships between schools and supply staff.
- The chance to use the grants to retain NQTs beyond their placement periods.

26. Barriers to additional capacity include:

- Competition from other sectors that are better paid or offer more flexibility, with fewer qualification requirements.
- The ability to only offer short-term contracts when paid for by the grants.
- The length of time to complete the hiring process can sometimes be longer than the window available to spend the grant.
- Limited availability of staff who are able to teach in the medium of Welsh.
- Schools further away from urban centres have smaller local populations to recruit from, and smaller grant amounts as they tend to be smaller in size.
- Continued staff absences due to COVID-19.

Impact

27. The RRRS Programme was delivered with broad alignment between locally identified need and national priority cohorts. Other than the priority cohorts, there was no evidence from the schools consulted for the evaluation of any other groups exhibiting greater need than their peers.

28. KS4 learners were particularly difficult to reengage post lockdown however this has changed in the subsequent academic years. Schools report that learners from more socially and economically advantaged families are disengaged to a greater degree than expected.

29. Pupil referral units (PRUs) and special schools have reported the lowest levels of disruption to learner development and progress compared to pre-pandemic levels (section 6.10.3).

30. Wellbeing support has been the most effective approach. This focus has been a central element in all areas of learning to increase learner engagement.

31. Best practice to increase the impact of the funding is to recruit staff with a clear aim to enable increased capacity.

<u>Guidance and compliance</u>

32. Guidance from Welsh Government has been regarded as a very high standard by schools and other stakeholders. A key positive to stakeholders is the perceived high degree of flexibility allowed in both how local needs are identified and the strategies deployed by schools to address them.

**The future**

33. It is vital to understand that the effects of Covid-19 on learners, and schools will be persistent in the long-term. The experience of disrupted education will remain with children, and the workforce will face continued disruption from Covid-19 absences.

34. The increased staff capacity due to RRRS is entirely reliant on the grant funding. The capacity uplift will end when the programme ends. There is currently no plan amongst schools that stretch beyond the RRRS grant.