

By email

15th September 2021

Dear Jayne,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Committee's priority areas during the next Senedd term.

Several of my recommendations and commentaries below are relevant to other Senedd Committees, but I wanted to flag them to you too because efforts should be made across Committees to integrate respective areas of work. Better integration of policy areas will ensure collective scrutiny, the ability to identify implementation gaps and offer solutions across the Senedd's work. You can find my letters to other Committees [here](#).

I would also like to suggest to you and to other Committees a cross-cutting area, which can be looked at jointly and in collaboration by some, or ideally all, Senedd Committees: Skills for a Green Recovery. This is an area my own team has recently explored, and you can find our latest publication [here](#). A prosperous, equal, green recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 means delivering good quality livelihoods to all, whilst supporting rapid decarbonisation and improving biodiversity. This starts with having the right education, curriculum and life experiences in place for children and young people to be equipped with the right skills for a rapidly changing world. During the last Senedd term, this Committee looked in some detail at the findings of my [Fit for the Future Education in Wales](#) report.

In May 2020, I published the first ever [Future Generations Report](#), which considered the progress made by public bodies in implementing the Well-being of Future Generations Act. It also set out the actions and recommendations public bodies should adopt as they further implement the legislation. I have highlighted for the Committee below the most relevant findings of the report for your consideration (see Annexe 1 for relevant recommendations). I would encourage all Committee Members to consider the report and in particular the sections on [Skills for the Future](#) and [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#), as well as my recent analysis of the skills needed for a green recovery, [Skills through Crisis: Upskilling and \(Re\)Training for a Green Recovery in Wales](#).

I would also suggest you consider the [upcoming second iteration of the Future Trends Report](#), which will be published later this year by Welsh Government. Annex 2 below provides you with some of the relevant future trends which could impact the Committee's remit.

I would also advise all Committees to consider how their chosen priority areas align with the objectives and steps within the published [Programme for government](#).

My team and I would be happy to meet with Committee Members or clerks to discuss this further, if you think that would be useful.

Education

In a rapidly changing world, providing our children and young people with education and the opportunity to develop the right set of skills for their future is widely accepted as a significant determinant of life outcomes including health, socio-economic position and life expectancy. We need to react positively to these changes to ensure people have the right skills for our future Wales.

That is why 'skills for the future', which includes education, is one of the [policy areas of focus](#) that I have selected for my office following an extensive involvement exercise. Providing people with the right skills for their future and our future world has the potential to address multiple challenges that our current and future generations are facing and contribute to a number of the well-being goals set out in the Act.

The findings that emerged through my work on skills and education over the years include:

- There is a gap between the skills, qualifications and experiences currently gained by children and young people and the rapidly changing technological, environmental, social and political world. Without better long-term planning and faster action, children and young people in Wales will not be prepared for their future or the challenges facing our planet.
- The new curriculum provides a solid framework for realising the well-being of individuals in Wales, but teachers will need to be supported to deliver a whole school approach to well-being and the inspection regime will need to reflect this too.
- There will need to be a significant increase in the number of teaching staff and resources to deliver the new curriculum, if it is to reach its potential.
- The 'Schooling Re-imagined' review indicates a positive step towards a better understanding of how schools can contribute to well-being in its broadest sense.
- Local authorities and Welsh Government are missing opportunities to involve and engage education leaders and teaching staff in delivering the national well-being vision set out in the Act through the education system.
- Welsh Government should support schools to provide learning beyond the traditional teaching classroom. Public bodies should make more use of employers and business in their area to support teaching and learning in softer skills and work experience.
- Whilst things are improving, persistent inequalities remain in Wales when it comes to education and employment.
- Our education and skills system must seek to get us closer to one million Welsh speakers by 2050 and a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
- The Curriculum for Wales 2022 provides an opportunity to give more focus to environmental well-being in the education system.

Based on my existing advice and work, I would encourage the Committee to consider focusing their work on education around the following themes:

- **Skills must be seen as a driver of wider well-being.**
- **Championing the increasing demand for 'softer skills' like creativity, problem-solving and communication.**

- **Re-thinking examinations and qualifications to reflect skills for the future.**
- **Our education and skills system needs to be flexible to demographic change and work for everyone.**
- **Taking advantage of new environmental industries in Wales.**

More detail and advice in relation to education can be found in the Section on [Skills for the Future](#) in the Future Generations Report; my recent [analysis of Skills](#); my white paper, [Fit for the Future Education in Wales](#); and my paper, [A Fit For the Future Programme for Government](#). In September, I will also be publishing a report on future trends specifically related to inequalities, which may be of interest to the Committee as it includes trends that will have impact on children and young people.

Health and well-being of children

Preventing and mitigating the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences is a crosscutting theme and is essential to future generations' health and well-being and, as such, it is one of my [areas of focus](#).

By preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), we would significantly reduce harmful behaviours in future generations. These are complex issues that need to be addressed collectively, as no one person can resolve or respond effectively to Adverse Childhood Experiences and their impact in isolation.

In relation to the health and well-being of children, my advice, findings and recommendations can be found in the Sections on [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) and [A Healthier Wales](#) in the Future Generations Report.

My findings include:

- The education system in Wales is taking steps to become 'ACE aware' and support mental health.
- Parts of the system in Wales have strengthened their focus on early intervention and prevention, particularly in the early years, but there are implementation gaps.
- Taking a public health approach can help kick start the change needed and ensure any change is based on evidence of what works.
- We are not always joining the dots between evidence-based interventions which are already in place, how they support the prevention of ACE agenda, and how they should be scaled across Wales.
- There are emerging examples of public services coming together to create an early help system for families, but some are still working in silos without anyone having a 'helicopter' view of how everything fits together.
- There does not appear to be a holistic way of measuring the impact of early intervention and prevention within the current system.
- Government could go further in putting kindness and compassion at the heart of public policy and service delivery in Wales.
- Mental health is a pressing concern for future generations, with poor mental health increasing across our society.

Based on my existing advice and work, I would encourage the Committee to consider focusing their work on cohesive communities around the following themes:

- A joined up system focused on early intervention and prevention.
- All public service professionals need to be Adverse Childhood Experiences aware.
- Support for communities through an equal/reciprocal relationship with public services to provide the building blocks of resilience.
- Long-term, preventative spend. I agreed a [definition of prevention and preventative spend](#) with Welsh Government and continue to challenge them when they set budgets on its use and promotion amongst other public bodies.

Finally, you may also be interested in our bite-sized product for Skills, which is available [here](#), as well as some of the case studies of good practice that I have been collecting, which are available [here](#).

Once again, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to feed into their priorities for the next Senedd terms. Should you wish to discuss any of the above points in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact my team at ContactUs@futuregenerations.wales.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Howe
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Annexe 1

Relevant Recommendations from the Future Generations Report 2020

Skills for the Future

Key Recommendation

Welsh Government should bring all sectors together as part of a coordinated national mission to deliver education fit for the future. This should be funded through the creation of a Welsh Education Tax, directed towards the transition to the new Curriculum for Wales and provision for lifelong learning.

Policy Recommendations

Welsh Government should:

- Use taxation powers and the economic contract to incentivise entrepreneurs, large businesses, micro-businesses and small and medium enterprises to work directly with schools as part of a Wales wide programme.
- Create a vision and plan to ensure Wales becomes the most eco-literate country in the world.
- Radically re-think qualifications at age 16, towards assessments that focus on diversity and are centered around pupils, not testing, reflecting the aspirations of the new Curriculum for Wales 2022.
- Establish an intergenerational skills switch programme.
- Prioritise mental health and well-being education in the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales, to help nurture a generation of emotionally resilient children.
- In collaboration with local education authorities, shift their focus towards prevention across schools in Wales to reduce the number of children excluded from school, helping to improve the life trajectory of children who are at an increased risk of inclusion due to inequality, and help break lifelong cycles of disadvantage, loneliness and adversity.
- Increase teaching practitioners and support teachers to access continuous professional learning, including access to properly developed content and best practice approaches across and outside Wales, to maximise the potential of the new Curriculum.

Process Recommendations:

In their day to day actions Welsh Government should stop:

- Valuing traditional knowledge based qualifications over softer skills like creativity, problem-solving and communication.
- Providing funding for businesses without requiring them to contribute towards the national mission on education and skills for the future.
- Measuring school and university performance on economic value and assessment results and instead move towards measures of well-being.

In their day to day actions Welsh Government should start:

- Encouraging all schools to collaborate with public bodies, business, charities and community members in their area.

- Communicating clearly how the Act links to the delivery of the new curriculum to ensure the education sector are helping Wales to meet the well-being goals.
- Finding ways to place eco-literacy at the centre of education and lifelong learning.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Key Recommendation

Welsh Government should build on programmes, such as Flying Start, to tackle Adverse Childhood Experiences; to make early intervention and childhood adversity a priority. Welsh Government should set out a clear national strategy to empower and encourage all key public services to deliver effective, sustainable and evidence-based early intervention.

Policy Recommendations:

Welsh Government should:

- Invest more in the first 1000 days work, ensuring interventions are evidenced based and monitoring of impact is holistic.
- Ensure that school exclusions become a thing of the past with more focused and dedicated work on how we make this happen.
- Align long term investment in services with long term strategies for prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Build capability and capacity within local services to generate high-quality evidence of what works in breaking intergenerational cycles. The routine use of this evidence should become part of 'business as usual', alongside investing in and scaling up what works with increased use of implementation science to ensure success.

Process Recommendations:

In their day to day actions Welsh Government should stop:

- Short term funding pots for delivery of essential services in early intervention and prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Scattered responsibility across government for early intervention and prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Short-term initiatives for quick wins.

In their day to day actions Welsh Government should start:

- Prioritising long-term funding for evidence based whole system services which can break intergenerational cycle.
- Developing a pooled and dedicated budget and resource to focus on early intervention and prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences without creating another silo.
- Providing holistic monitoring of the impact of early intervention and prevention of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- To introduce a 'Real Life Fast Tack' programme within the civil service and public sector. In order to bring a variety of skills, perspectives and experiences to the public services of the future, Welsh

Government should work with public bodies to introduce a 'Real Life Fast Track' programme, seeking to recruit people who are experts on their own lives.

You may also find the recommendations in relation to leadership and cultural change in Welsh Government and Public Bodies of interest. You can find these recommendations [here](#) and [here](#).

Annexe 2

Future Trends to Watch

Current Trends

- Attainment in primary and secondary schools in Wales has risen overall in recent years, although inequalities persist with children from particular ethnic groups and children from deprived backgrounds not achieving the same outcomes as their peers.
- Children are the most likely to be in relative poverty ([29% of children compared to 19% of pensioners](#)).
- The number of children in care and on child protection plans in the UK [has risen since 2013](#) at a rate that outstrips the growth of the child population.
- In Wales, the number of children on the child protection register because of sexual abuse [has declined by 28%](#) between 2007/08 and 2017/18.
- In Wales, the number of children being cared for by local authorities due to emotional or physical abuse or neglect in 2019 [has increased by 6%](#) compared to 2018.
- The prevalence of mental health problems among children and young people is [on the rise](#).
- A quarter of Welsh children starting school each year are overweight or obese, and these levels are worst in our poorest communities.

Future Predictions:

- 65% of children entering primary school today will go on to do jobs which do not yet exist.
- Skills such as creativity, emotional intelligence and problem-solving will be some of the most important in the future. Behaviours and soft skills will be more valuable than qualifications.
- Relative child poverty in the UK is projected [to rise to 36% in 2021-22](#)
- Social care budgets will [continue to be insufficient to meet demand](#), causing a reduced provision of services that [prevent family crisis](#).