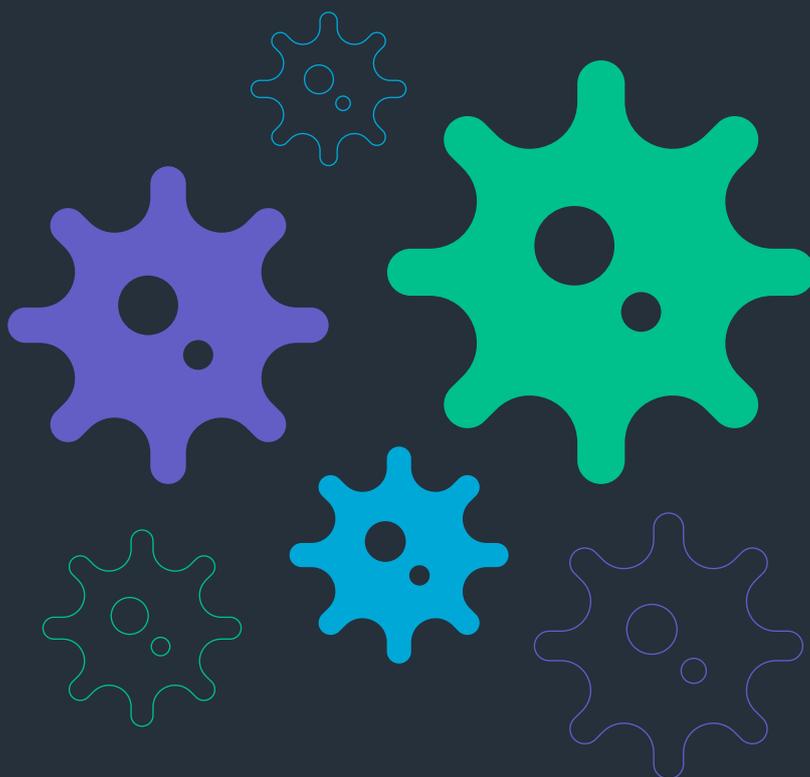


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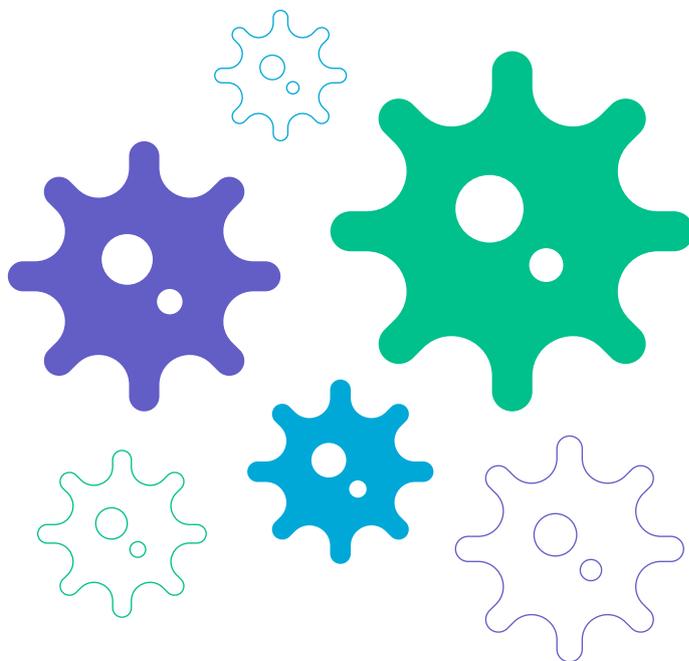


NEU Cymru Education Recovery Plan

February 2021



Foreword



The National Education Union (NEU) education recovery plan sets out how to reopen schools and colleges in a safe and sustainable way.

The plan outlines the challenges that our education system must overcome if pupils are to recover their confidence, interest and joy in learning and to make the progress they are capable of.

The last section of the plan looks beyond schools and colleges to wider societal issues, in particular the huge and lasting damage that child poverty wreaks upon our already most disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people, and proposes concrete measures to tackle it.

Our plan provides a route towards sustainable school and college opening and away from the Government's stop/start approach, which has resulted in schools and colleges being closed to full pupil intakes twice.

The plan is rooted in the union's detailed knowledge, drawn from our members' professional experience and expertise, and our close attention to the science around Covid-19, to state clearly what preparations and precautions are needed for schools and colleges to open, and be given the best chance to remain open. Our children and young people, and their parents, deserve no less.

The NEU will work hard to get the Welsh Government to accept the proposals in this plan so that our members can return to school, when the science says it is safe to do so, with confidence that their health and the education of their pupils, will be properly protected.



NEU Cymru Education Recovery Plan – February 2021



The Covid-19 pandemic has been disruptive to all aspects of life, including education. We have seen the closure of schools and colleges across Wales to many learners over the past year – including the period last March, over the autumn ‘fire-break’, before Christmas, and since the beginning of January, as well as individuals and year groups having to isolate because of the virus.

The Welsh Government must act urgently to create the conditions to sustain education throughout and beyond the pandemic. Schools and colleges need to be safe places to work and learn. Our members don’t want to be delivering lessons online, but would prefer to be in their classrooms, teaching and supporting young people in their learning. But we are sadly not in that place at the moment.

Welsh Government does recognise that “education settings being open can contribute to wider social mixing outside the school and college environment”¹, which has led to schools and colleges remaining open to some students only, to help towards the national effort towards keeping the spread of the virus down. NEU Cymru is working with the Welsh Government to try to create Covid-secure conditions in all schools and colleges to keep those who work and learn within them safe.

School and college staff need to work in education buildings with adequate social distancing in place – without whole year group ‘bubbles’ in secondary schools, with adequate PPE and good ventilation.

We believe the Welsh Government accepts that we need to look at a range of options in terms of the wider opening of education settings. Right now, we believe the level of the virus in Wales has dropped significantly², and we welcome that the Welsh Government believe education is a priority.

Therefore, preparations we make now need to reflect this. Schools and colleges may not be back for full reopening for some time; and that safe education requires a commitment to safety when in school and college and to continuing remote education where necessary.

We worked with the Welsh Government on the current operational guidance³, and would be looking for this to be stronger where possible, should schools open more widely. The guidance has been changed in line with many of our asks to date, including the need for updating risk assessments, involving trade unions, increase social distancing, suggesting masks be worn in classrooms (although Welsh Government say where social distancing cannot occur), encouraging ventilation, and the suggestion that pregnant women should work from home.

¹ gov.wales/secondary-schools-and-colleges-wales-will-move-online-learning-monday-part-national-effort-reduce

² bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-52574859

³ gov.wales/operational-guidance-schools-and-settings-support-limited-attendance-html



NEU Cymru is represented on the working group for the wider return to FE provision. This group has agreed to prioritise vocational courses, where students need to be on site to take assessments.

Covid-19 has exposed the endemic levels of poverty and inequality in the UK. Sadly, in Wales, 28% of children live in relative income poverty⁴. Characteristics of the groups in relative income poverty make them especially vulnerable to the virus:

- People who were living in households where the head of the household was from a non-white ethnic group were more likely to be in relative income poverty.
- Living in a household where there was someone with a disability increased the likelihood of living in relative income poverty for working-age adults and children but not for pensioners.

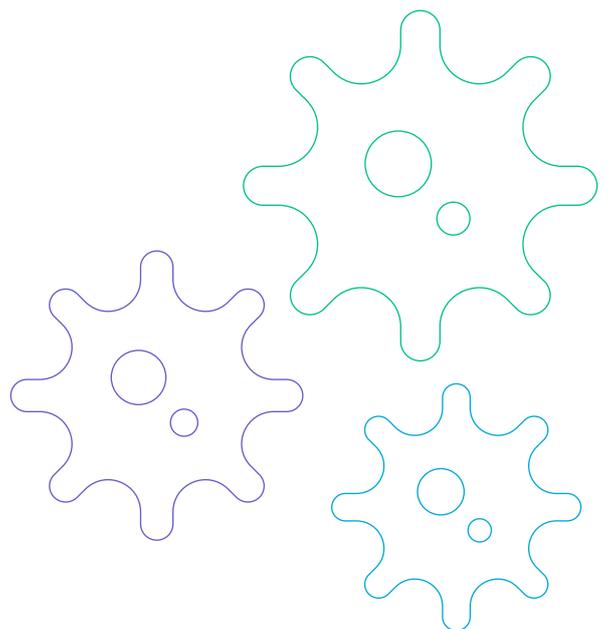
Since we know that the pandemic particularly impacts on Black people and disabled people (who are more likely to be clinically vulnerable), the levels of relative income poverty for children is a concern. The concern that young people will take the virus home to their families and communities has been raised by us, including in our evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee.⁵

Our education recovery plan is split into three parts. The first focuses on the challenge of educating learners safely, by creating safer educational workplaces and continuing remote learning where necessary.

The second part of the plan contains proposals to build a better education system as we emerge from the pandemic.

The third section of the plan is a call to fight child poverty and to build a better Wales, post-Covid, for all our children and young people.

NEU Cymru wants to work with the Welsh Government to make sure we have a plan in place to help children and young people to learn as we recover from the pandemic.



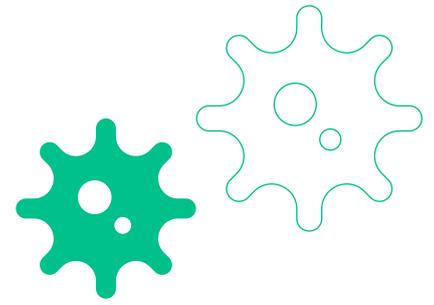
⁴ gov.wales/relative-income-poverty-april-2018-march-2019

⁵ senedd.tv/Meeting/Archive/5009e17c-04c1-48bf-83f5-e6480534091d?autostart=True



Part 1

Safety in our schools and colleges



1. Social distancing.

Social distancing and limitations on social mixing are required for Covid-19 security in schools and colleges. This is even more essential than before because of the increased transmissibility of the new Covid-19 variants.

Rationale: From September to December 2020, Covid-19 infection rates rose amongst secondary and primary age groups alike so that, by Christmas, secondary students were the most infected age group and primary, the second in England, where levels of the UK variant were highest.

Levels of infection for secondary students multiplied by 75 times throughout the autumn term.⁶ We believe whole year group bubbles allowed Covid-19 to spread amongst pupils.

Social distancing is essential to reduce the spread of Covid-19 amongst students, and from them to their families, and into their communities.

The third most highly infected age group, by the end of the autumn term, were adults of parental age who are scheduled for later vaccination – so the importance of suppressing infection in schools remains paramount.

While schools and colleges remain open only to some students, further steps must be taken to limit the numbers that are still attending, through reviewing the categories allowed to attend and permitting leaders to limit numbers further where necessary.

Limits on bubble size and mixing and crossing bubbles must not be relaxed as we

open for a wider return. When more students return, arrangements for distancing, bubbles and constraints on mixing must be maintained.

2. Limit numbers on site through rotas and remote education.

Rationale: The UK has some of the most crowded school and college buildings in the OECD. If social distancing in education buildings is to become a reality, then fewer students must be on site. Rotas are a good means of allowing regular attendance for face-to-face teaching in schools and colleges whilst reducing overcrowding and enabling social distancing.

Special schools and colleges are already operating rota systems and must be encouraged to share good practice and what works for pupils and staff when operating them.

It will be necessary to employ more staff for rotas to work effectively both to lower numbers of pupils in classrooms and maintain high quality remote education. Schools and colleges should be given increased funding to employ supply staff, newly-qualified teachers without posts, and support staff to meet the greatly increased workload involved in teaching some students in school and others remotely.

Other approaches which could be adopted include erecting marquees on school sites and identifying and bringing back into use unused public buildings, which could permit primary schools to reduce group sizes without implementing rotas.

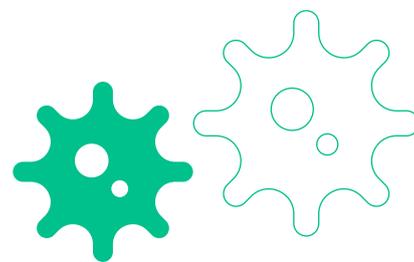
⁶ [Coronavirus Infection Survey](#)

Please note figures for Wales are more limited, due to the sample of data provided. The level of the new variant was also higher in England, so provides useful information to know what could happen in Wales now.



Part 1

Safety in our schools and colleges



3. Increase the use of face coverings and better ventilation.

Rationale: The risk of infection is greatest indoors, in crowded spaces – a description which sums up the situation in most schools and colleges.

Mask wearing suppresses viral transmission. Secondary-aged students, in particular, are known to be able to transmit the virus to each other and into their households.⁷ They are also old enough to understand the importance of wearing a face covering and able to learn and practise good habits in mask wearing.

Face coverings should be worn by secondary-aged students in classrooms as well as all other areas of the school. Masks should be worn at all times by all staff in all schools and colleges. Classrooms must also be well ventilated, whilst maintaining a reasonable temperature; costs for additional heating must be reimbursed.

4. Education staff should be vaccinated as a priority.

Rationale: Whilst vaccination will not stop the highest level of Covid-19 transmission into the community – from pupils to their families – it will provide greatly increased levels of safety for school and college staff, who have no choice other than to work in close proximity with primary and secondary pupils, who are the most infected age groups.

It is welcome that the Welsh Government has included school staff involved in delivery of 'intimate personal care' for those with complex needs as care workers, as priority for the vaccine. But all education professionals in special schools (as across the board) need to be vaccinated.

Education professionals are at potential risk because of the need for close physical contact and the difficulty in keeping these pupils socially distanced. Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and clinically vulnerable education staff, should be allowed to work from home supporting children's remote education until they are vaccinated, and the level of the virus has dropped significantly.

5. Specific support for special/ additional needs settings.

Rationale: NEU Cymru has highlighted the specific challenges faced by special schools and alternative provision during this time to the Welsh Government.

Special schools and alternative provision need:

- smaller class sizes.
- rotas for staff and pupils.
- CEV staff and pupils working remotely.
- mask wearing allowed where the school deems appropriate.
- medical grade PPE provided to carry out personal care and Aerosol Generated Procedures (AGPs).

There are other specific needs for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), including:

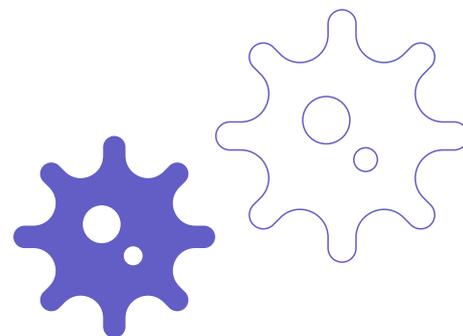
- funding for adaptive technology for remote learning.
- specialist tutors and additional qualified specialist staff to address learning gaps and social and emotional development needs.
- access to services such as CAMHS and occupational health for parents and carers, with planning for additional services afterwards to meet increased demand.

⁷ [Children's Task and Finish Group: update to 4 Nov 2020 paper on children, schools and transmission, page 9](#)



Part 2

Let's build a better education system



This pandemic has highlighted many flaws in our education system, and we must address them. As more pupils return to schools, we must not rush headlong into a route march back to the past but take this opportunity to question those aspects which are not working, and to reflect on practices which school and college staff and pupils have learnt to do differently.

Until the population is vaccinated, and infection rates are manageable, there is likely to be continuing disruption to education. A recovery plan is needed that focuses on what's most important for learners over the next year. Schools must be encouraged to support students to learn what they need for their next stages of education, rather than to simply pass tests or exams. And pupils will also need to have more opportunities to revisit learning content that has been previously covered.

1. A well thought out reintegration plan, with flexibility for schools to meet the needs of their communities.

Rationale: School leaders know the needs of their communities and their pupils and should be supported in their plans for gradual return. Welsh Government could provide models, and support leaders to share practice. Plans should also be made to support blended learning, where pupils access both remote and face-to-face teaching.

Estyn should not return to a full inspection programme while schools and colleges are working to reintegrate pupils, assess their continuing needs and understand what they have learnt during lockdown. Instead,

Estyn should continue their approach from this academic year and focus on thematic reports which support school and college staff in understanding the most effective approaches to reintegrating children and young people to learning in school, the possible learning loss experienced by pupils and the most effective ways of tackling this.

2. Employ supply teachers and qualified teachers who have left the profession to work in schools and colleges.

Rationale: Pupils returning to school will have experienced very different home learning environments. The attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children could have grown.

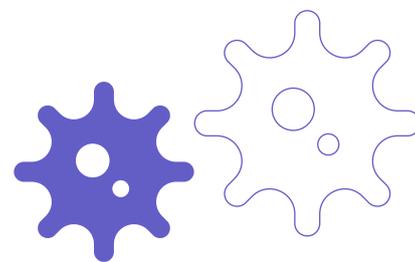
NEU Cymru welcomed the Welsh Government's "Check-in, Catch-up and Prepare" scheme. But given the continued disruption to face-to-face learning this year, schools will need to be given increased staffing budgets to employ additional qualified teaching staff to support individualised and small group tuition for pupils who need it when they return to school and college.

Trainees and newly qualified teachers have also suffered during the periods of lockdown, without sufficient time in classrooms or with colleagues to complete their training satisfactorily. Welsh Government should plan additional support, through support for NQTs, to ensure that these teachers meet the standards and that they are motivated to stay in the profession. This could also include supporting local authorities to host support over the summer.



Part 2

Let's build a better education system



3. Delay implementation of the new curriculum and resource a recovery curriculum to run over a number of years.

Rationale: Children and young people will have had significant disruption over two years. Whilst NEU Cymru supports the principles behind the new Curriculum for Wales, reiterated in the Implementation Plan⁸, now is not the time to rush, but to ensure schools have everything they need to make the new curriculum a success over the longer-term.

Pupils will need to be taught what they require for their next stages of education, rather than to simply pass tests or exams. Schools are best placed to know what their pupils need, and Welsh Government should develop a transition phase, over at least the next year, with flexibility to disapply the curriculum as necessary in order to provide the depth and breadth of teaching and other support which pupils require.

We know Welsh Government is working with Qualifications Wales and WJEC on plans for this year's cohort who were due to sit exams. We are working with the Welsh Government, via their Learning, Qualifications, and Progression – External Stakeholder Reference Group, to try and make sure that educators have everything they need to support young people with their qualifications.

Welsh Government should be planning now for those who are sitting exams and vocational qualifications in 2021/2. This should be a well-planned combination of exams and moderated centre assessment, with time given to develop moderation and to offer training to teachers.

Welsh Government need to look carefully at plans to implement the Additional Learning

Needs and Education Tribunals (ALNET) Act, and delay implementation, as the Minister is considering⁹. There is too much uncertainty already in the system for young people with additional needs, and now is not the time to implement huge system change, but to ensure teachers and support staff have all the training they need.

4. Plans must be made for those who are in transition years.

Rationale: Welsh Government needs to provide support for pupils currently in Year 6 so that their transition to secondary can operate more smoothly than the previous year. Students in year 7 currently will have experienced a disrupted transition between primary and secondary schools, which will have impacted on their learning and their relationships with peers and teachers.

Children in the early years, and those about to start school, will have missed out on many formative experiences of social interaction with peers and unfamiliar adults. Nursery and reception classes will need to be well resourced for social, physical, and academic support.

National Reading and Numeracy Personalised Assessments cannot go ahead as planned. They will have a negative impact on children's wellbeing.

Others have also started to ask the question, is now the time to make education compulsory beyond 16? This could help ensure that young people have a guaranteed college place, in line with their aspirations, and prevent young people being 'lost' from education. Wales has too many young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)¹⁰.

⁸ hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/curriculum-for-wales-implementation-plan/

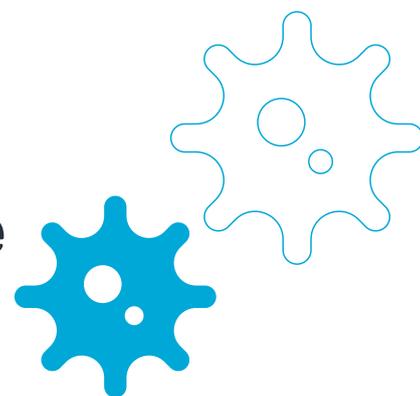
⁹ gov.wales/written-statement-implementation-additional-learning-needs-and-education-tribunal-wales-act-2018-0

¹⁰ <https://gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-april-2019-march-2020-html>



Part 3

Work as a nation to give all children and young people the best start in life



As we have already highlighted, there are too many young people living in poverty in Wales and living in households with people who could face more significant impacts from Covid-19.

Whilst Welsh Government does not hold all the levers in relation to child poverty, they have issued a Child Poverty Maximalisation plan¹¹ which includes an objective that commits to “The cost of sending children to school is reduced”. The plan looks at a range of measure which are within the Welsh Government’s power to support. This plan is welcome and needs to be implemented fully.

In the same way the 1940s post-war UK Government drew on the model from Tredegar to produce the NHS, the Welsh Government needs to embrace the Bevan and Beveridge spirit, to ensure young people in Wales are supported.

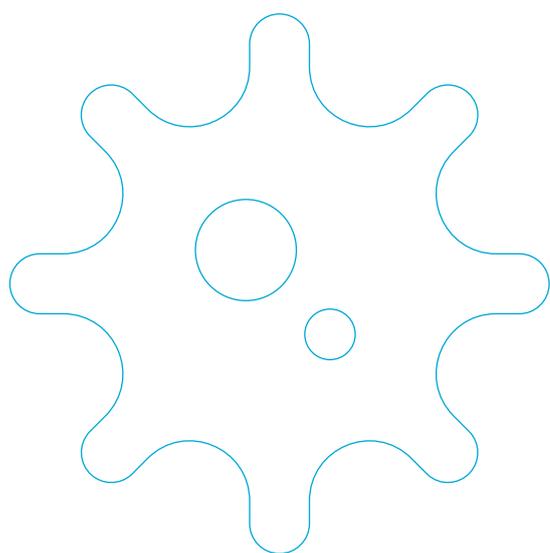
- 1. All pupils must be guaranteed access to broadband and laptops, which will enable them to learn remotely, and to study and develop their skills once schools are fully open.**

Rationale: Ofcom estimates that between 1.14m and 1.78m children in the UK have no home access to a laptop, desktop computer or tablet. The Welsh Government’s scheme to provide these¹² needs to reach all of the young people who need access to online learning.

Whilst online learning is not the only strategy used by teachers to educate their pupils remotely, it is an important element of that provision. It is disappointing that so many children and young people do not have access to the internet or laptops when they are so essential for studying, information finding, and development of their I.T. skills and confidence – all vital to their future employment.

- 2. A fully-resourced national plan for children’s wellbeing should be launched to support those who suffered trauma in the pandemic.**

Rationale: Students’ wellbeing must be placed at the centre of how we adapt education to meet the needs of children and young people. Too many children and young people’s mental health has suffered during the pandemic. They must be supported to recover and regain their wellbeing and confidence in themselves and their future.



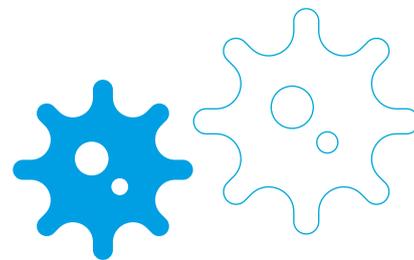
¹¹ gov.wales/child-poverty-income-maximisation-action-plan-2020-2021-html#section-54007

¹² gov.wales/device-and-connectivity-update-digitally-excluded-learners-during-coronavirus-covid-19-html



Part 3

Work as a nation to give all children and young people the best start in life

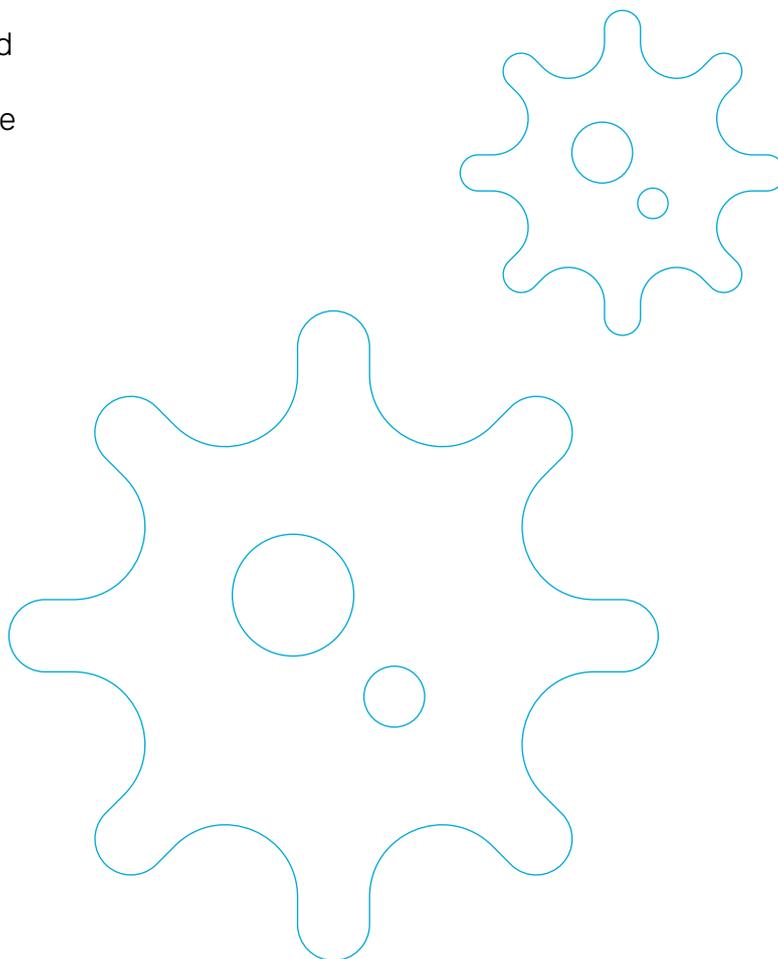


Whilst Welsh Government is conscious of the link between poverty and mental health in their plans¹³, and wellbeing is a key part of the new Curriculum, support for young people must be a priority.

3. Expand free school meal provision.

Rationale: Free School meal (FSM) provision should be expanded to all families in receipt of Universal Credit and children should be able to access FSM during school holidays on a permanent basis. The costs to parents for schooling must be kept to a minimum – the Welsh Government must ensure an upper cap to the costs of school uniforms.

Welsh Government has clearly highlighted FSM and uniform in their plans¹⁴, but we know that increasing eligibility would have a positive impact on young people within families who are struggling during this difficult time.



¹³ gov.wales/child-poverty-income-maximisation-action-plan-2020-2021-html#section-54007

¹⁴ gov.wales/child-poverty-income-maximisation-action-plan-2020-2021-html#section-54007



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