

## EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Thursday, 28 <sup>th</sup> January, 2021
<b>Report Subject</b>	School Improvement and Examination 2021 Update
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Education
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Education & Youth)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As the provider of school improvement services to the Council, GwE has played a vital and integral role during the Covid-19 emergency to support schools in Flintshire and across North Wales. The service has repeatedly changed its focus to meet the needs of schools in the rapidly changing environment created by the pandemic and has been a critical partner in the Flintshire's response to support school leaders and the schools' workforce in their core role of supporting learners across all phases of education. This began immediately with the first lockdown in March 2020 when educational provision was suspended and continues right up to the current day when schools are having to provide a combination of blended and distance learning with some limited face to face provision for particular groups of learners.

During this time, GwE has been flexible and agile and has worked effectively with Flintshire's Education Portfolio and wide range of stakeholders to ensure the well-being of school leaders, their staff and their learners.

GwE has also worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning, and with Estyn to rapidly develop guidance and resources for distance and blended learning which has enabled schools in Flintshire to respond quickly to a different model of educational delivery forced upon them by the pandemic. GwE has enabled schools to develop strategies and resources for accelerated learning to target pupils' skills and knowledge, particularly in literacy and numeracy that have been impacted by disrupted educational provision over many months.

The professional development offer for the schools' workforce has been instrumental in quickly upskilling teachers and support staff in the use of digital technology and online learning tools to enable them to deliver a blended learning approach. Supporting schools to maintain their collaborative approach through well-established cluster working has ensured that effective practice has been

widely shared and the significant workload for schools in this period of intense change to be distributed, benefitting everyone. GwE officers have also been at the forefront of the discussion regarding the development of a model for assessment and examinations for 2021, working closely with Welsh Government (WG), the examination board (WJEC), and the examination regulator, Qualifications Wales (QW).

The detailed appendices attached to this report comprehensively outline the work of GwE in supporting school improvement in Flintshire since March 2020 and their contribution to the development of a revised assessment and examination framework for Wales in 2021.

Estyn has recently published a national review of the response to the pandemic by local authorities and regional consortia and these documents are included to provide external assurance to the committee.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1	The committee confirms it has been able to effectively scrutinise the work of GwE in their delivery of school improvement services to Flintshire schools during the Covid-19 pandemic.
2	The committee acknowledges the extensive range of support delivered by GwE to enable schools to quickly and effectively change their models of educational provision in direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
3	The committee acknowledges the effective partnership working between GwE and the Education Portfolio to ensure that Flintshire schools received high quality and timely support in an unprecedented period of change and anxiety.

## REPORT DETAILS

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND EXAMINATION 2021 UPDATE REPORT</b>
1.01	<p>Appendix 1 – GwE Report to Local Authority Scrutiny Committees Autumn 2020 - provides a detailed overview of the response from GwE to the Covid-19 pandemic in its role as a provider of school improvement services. It outlines how the six local authorities and GwE, through the Management Board, took a collegiate and collective approach to supporting all schools across the region. This resulted in a consistent framework within which everyone operated, reducing workload for all and sharing the most effective practice across the region. Attached is also a short summary noted as Appendix 1a of the work undertaken by GwE to support school improvement in a rapidly changing environment.</p> <p>The report tracks the early work undertaken by GwE with local authorities to provide a model risk assessment process to ensure pupils could safely return to school for the Check in and Catch up sessions and then for the full reopening of schools in September.</p>

1.02	<p>Once schools reopened and positive Covid-19 cases were almost immediately identified in many schools across the region, this resulted in classes or even whole year groups having to go into isolation and access learning from home. GwE then switched its attention to developing resources and toolkits to enable schools to provide quality remote learning experiences and support materials for staff and parents. This blended learning offer is referenced in the report at Appendix 1 and has also been the subject of a separate, detailed report to the committee in December 2020.</p>
1.03	<p>The development of a comprehensive professional learning offer was essential alongside the new teaching and learning resources to ensure staff quickly acquired the skills to engage learners remotely using a range of digital platforms. This is outlined in the Appendix 1c attached to this report and demonstrates the huge range of training and development offered to the schools workforce across the region. This was welcomed by Flintshire schools and there have been very high levels of engagement.</p>
1.04	<p>Unsurprisingly, following the return to school in September, it quickly became clear that many learners had not progressed as much as they would have done if schools had been able to remain open. Evidence from a range of reliable sources including schools, Estyn, the Children’s Commissioner, The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and many children’s charities suggested that most or all learners were affected, and that the most vulnerable had been affected the most significantly.</p> <p>Welsh Government responded with the introduction of an Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) and specific funding for schools and educational consortia to deliver a ‘Recruit, Recover and Raise Standards’ strategy. This was designed to support learners to accelerate their skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy, and thereby given them access to the whole curriculum. GwE led the development of the ALP for the region and details of the resources they developed are outlined at Appendix 1b and will be highlighted in a short presentation at the committee meeting.</p>
1.05	<p>One of the most significant challenges faced by Welsh Government and the education sector in the current climate is the delivery of an equitable and robust system of assessment and examinations for GCSE, A Level and vocational qualifications for 2021. The Welsh Government commissioned an independent review of the challenges experienced in 2020 of awarding student grades and sought advice from a range of professionals and academics to create a more stable and equitable model for 2021.</p> <p>GwE officers and headteacher representatives have been involved in working parties with the examination board WJEC, the regulator Qualifications Wales and Welsh Government to develop a new model which was published in November 2020. At that time, the Education Minister, Kirsty Williams, confirmed that traditional examinations would be replaced by a 3 pillar approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• non-examination assessments where currently planned in the qualification;</li> <li>• internal assessments; and</li> </ul>

- assessments that are externally set and marked.

1.06

However, with the continuing spread of Covid-19 and the emergence of a new variant of the virus which is transmitted much more easily, Welsh Government made the decision to direct schools to adopt a remote learning approach for pupils at the beginning of January. This position remains under review but there is a real possibility that schools will continue to be closed for face to face learning for all but vulnerable learners and children of critical workers until February half term.

This has particular ramifications for examination groups who will not be able to access the full taught curriculum or the planned assessment activities. Welsh Government have therefore reviewed their proposals again for the awarding of grades to students in 2021.

On Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> January the Education Minister for Wales, Kirsty Williams announced that grades would be awarded in the following manner:

*“First, it is my intention that learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales will have their qualifications awarded through a Centre-Determined Grade model. This means that grades will be determined by their school or college based on an assessment of the learner’s work.*

*Schools and colleges will be able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to their learners, including Non-Examination Assessment elements, mock-exams, and classwork. In addition, the WJEC will offer a set of adapted past papers which can enable schools to continue to assess learning within their teaching plans, providing extra support for teachers and learners.*

*Qualifications Wales will work with WJEC, supported by the DDAG, to provide an assessment framework to support schools and colleges in developing their assessment plans, which should demonstrate sufficient coverage of key concepts to allow learners to progress, and detail for how the centre has determined a learner’s grade. These assessment plans will be quality assured by WJEC.*

*Second, recognising the challenges posed by the ongoing disruption and remote learning, the deadlines and controls around non-exam assessment are being removed and it will not be moderated by the WJEC. However where possible we would continue to encourage schools and colleges to support learners to undertake some of their Non-Examination Assessment to continue to build learning and skills. Building knowledge and skills, and covering core concepts to support progression, remains a priority and should continue to be a focus, supported by our guidance and approach to distance learning as appropriate.*

*Third, alongside the Assessment Framework, WJEC will publish guidance to support schools and colleges to develop internal quality assurance processes and the Design and Delivery Group will consider an approach to promote consistency across Wales.”*

	GwE and the Education Portfolio will continue to support all Flintshire secondary schools to implement the new model of assessment to be in the best position to award appropriate grades to students.
1.07	<p>Welsh Government commissioned Estyn, the independent inspectorate for education and training in Wales, to provide an overview of how local authorities and regional consortia have worked with schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) to promote learning and support vulnerable pupils during the COVID-19 period between June and November 2020. Through virtual interviews with school leaders, council officers and officers of the regional consortia; examination of a range of documentary evidence provided and surveys of parents and young people, Estyn has captured the ways local authorities and regional consortia have adapted their work to respond to the challenges resulting from COVID-19.</p> <p>The national report and the individual reports to consortia and local authorities include cameos of work that has been undertaken. Whilst they cannot be considered as formal evaluative case studies as usually presented by Estyn as best practice, they are included to exemplify points raised in the report, giving a flavour of the work that has taken place across Wales.</p> <p>The national thematic report is included at Appendix 2 and the individual report for GwE is included at Appendix 3. Both acknowledge and affirm the positive work undertaken by GwE in supporting schools across the North Wales region during the pandemic. The report for Flintshire will be attached to the Portfolio's Self Evaluation report due to be presented to the committee in March.</p>

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	The Council commissions its school improvement services through GwE via an Inter-Authority Agreement with the other North Wales councils. This sets the value of the financial contribution from Flintshire which can be reviewed every three years.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
3.01	<p>The Education Portfolio has a detailed risk assessment which outlines key risks related to the continued disruption of teaching and learning as a result of the ongoing pandemic and method statements which describe how these risks are managed. These are regularly reported to the committee.</p> <p>GwE also maintains its own risk register and follows its own risk monitoring processes which are reported on regularly to the GwE Joint Committee.</p>

<b>4.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED/CARRIED OUT</b>
4.01	N/A

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	<p>Appendix 1 - GwE Report for Scrutiny Committees</p> <p><u>Supporting Appendices</u></p> <p>1a. Summary of GwE Work Undertaken</p> <p>1b Accelerated Learning Report</p> <p>1c Professional Learning Offer</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Local authority and regional consortia support for schools and PRUs in response to COVID-19 (Estyn)</p> <p>Appendix 3 – GwE Letter (Estyn)</p>

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	<p>Ministerial statement regarding 2021 summer assessments</p> <p><a href="https://gov.wales/written-statement-update-general-qualifications-2021-0">https://gov.wales/written-statement-update-general-qualifications-2021-0</a></p>

<b>7.00</b>	<b>CONTACT OFFICER DETAILS</b>
7.01	<p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Claire Homard, Chief Officer Education &amp; Youth</p> <p><b>Telephone:</b> 01352 704190</p> <p><b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk">claire.homard@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p>

<b>8.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
	<p><b>GwE</b> – Regional School Effectiveness &amp; Improvement Service for North Wales</p> <p><b>Estyn</b> – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales</p> <p><b>Qualifications Wales (QW)</b> – The independent organisation responsible for regulating general and vocational qualifications in Wales.</p> <p><b>The Welsh Joint Education Council</b> – (WJEC) is an examination board, providing qualifications and exam assessment to schools and colleges in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and independent regions. WJEC is the largest provider in Wales.</p> <p><b>Management Board</b> – the regional educational leadership board of the 6 Chief Officers for Education and the Senior Management Team of GwE</p> <p><b>The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)</b> – is an intergovernmental economic organisation with 37 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade and which has a strong focus on education delivery and development.</p>