

Agreement between the First Minister and Education Secretary, December 2018

As First Minister and Education Secretary we affirm our commitment to the 2016 Progressive Agreement – both the policy programme and ways of working. We agree to these common and education priorities, maintaining and promoting our distinct party identities and policies, whilst reflecting our range of shared values and ambitions.

Working together in government, we commit to pushing the boundaries of our devolved powers to help people, communities and the country as a whole to fulfil our potential. Recognising the significant progress made since 2016, and the many real challenges facing Wales, this updated agreement demonstrates our commitment to providing our nation with a government that every day will work towards a fair and just society.

‘Education in Wales: Our National Mission’ sets out an ambitious, progressive and innovative action plan for education reform. It will continue to be the basis of our programme to raise standards, reduce the attainment gap and ensure an education system that is a source of national pride and enjoys public confidence.

We are reforming higher and further education so that there is funding and opportunities that benefit learners of all ages, and we will continue to view high-quality education as the driving force for social mobility, national prosperity and an engaged democracy.

The Government has already delivered across our ambitious education priorities over the last two years:

- Wales is the only nation in Europe to deliver equivalent living costs support – in grants and loans – for full and part-time undergraduates and postgraduates;
- We have significantly increased our support for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds so that every child gets the best start;
- We are delivering the single biggest investment in support for teachers since devolution;
- We are reducing infant class sizes across the country;
- And we are well on our way to transforming the school curriculum, delivering higher standards of literacy and numeracy and ensuring our young people are more digitally and bilingually competent.

Annex A sets out the Common and Education Priorities from the Progressive Agreement, to which we remain committed. The following headline priorities builds on those and reflects the commitments made by the new First Minister in his leadership campaign, the ‘Our National Mission’ action plan and agreements between the First Minister and Education Secretary.

- Design, develop and deliver a world-class curriculum, supported by robust assessment and accountability arrangements that will raise standards across our schools.
- Raise standards and opportunities for pupils from our most disadvantaged backgrounds through targeted support, including doubling the new PDG Access Grant and extending the School Holiday Food and Fun programme.
- Deliver a National Approach to Professional Learning, valuing our teachers’ excellence and giving them the tools to raise standards through record investment in their development.

- Work with the teaching profession to reduce bureaucracy and unnecessary workload, including extended use of business managers so that heads and teachers can dedicate more of their time to raising standards and reducing the attainment gap.
- Attract and retain more high-quality applicants and high calibre mature graduates into teaching through new entry routes into the profession.
- Extend our new Community Focused Schools Initiative to offer additional support to schools and colleges to help parents and children learn together.
- Continue to reduce infant class sizes, targeted towards those pupils and schools that will benefit the most.
- Develop a 'whole school' approach to mental health and wellbeing for young people – including more professional learning for teachers.
- Ensure the National Academy of Educational Leadership is delivering the enhanced leadership capacity we need across the sector.
- Encourage teachers with some ability to speak Welsh to further develop their skills to teach through the medium of Welsh, and develop 'pools' of Welsh teaching staff to be shared between schools.
- Explore how we can deliver a new Welsh right to life-long learning, investing in the skills which people need throughout their lives, for individual, societal and economic benefit.
- Further encourage universities to help raise standards in schools by expanding undergraduate mentoring schemes in key disciplines such as science, languages and computing – this should be a key part of their enhanced civic engagement.
- Maintain our commitment to apprenticeships, including higher level apprenticeships, across key sectors such as creative, digital and engineering, through increased collaboration between universities, Further Education colleges and industry.
- Deliver a whole-system solution to the funding, regulation and performance of tertiary education, training and research and innovation – creating a new Commission that will take on responsibilities right across those sectors.
- Strengthen international education links benefitting students, researchers, institutions, economic regions and the nation as a whole.
- Continue to commit to the most progressive and equitable student support system in the UK, providing living costs support to full-time, part-time undergraduates and post-graduates, also ensuring a stable and sustainable future for our further and higher education sectors.
- Deliver an increase in the number of part-time and post-graduate students, ensuring that more students from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from these opportunities.
- Continue to work with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and other partners to enhance skills provision, vocational courses and promotion of Welsh-medium courses and teacher recruitment and retention, in line with our Cymraeg 2050 strategy.

We jointly commit to these priorities, and it will be for the Education Secretary to lead on delivery of these commitments, as a full member of the Government in the same manner as arrangements since 2016.

We will meet weekly to ensure that the terms of the agreement are being met and to discuss other issues as they arise. As the Ministerial Code makes clear, collective responsibility is binding on all of us in Government. This calls for a consistent approach to conducting business. In recognition of our distinct party identities, we agree that on occasion we will express alternative positions on reserved matters, as has been the case on specific votes in relation to UK/EU relations. We will approach these matters in good faith and with no surprises.

We will work together, and across Government, in the best interests of citizens and our country. The opportunity of working together in Government commits us to reducing inequality, promote fairness for all, and a just society fit for the challenges and opportunities ahead.