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**Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response**

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<b>Pwnc / Subject:</b>	<b>Co-ordinated school admission arrangements</b>

**Background information about Estyn**

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000<sup>1</sup> and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;

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<sup>1</sup> This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

This response is not confidential.

## Response

### Introduction

We feel that the proposed co-ordinated admission scheme in Wales has the potential to address certain inefficiencies and uncertainties in the current system and we broadly support the proposals presented in this consultation.

Potential advantages:

- The co-ordinated admission scheme intends to streamline the admissions process, and this could reduce the time and effort spent by both parents and admission authorities.
- The co-ordinated admission system may decrease the number of appeals, as parents would be limited to one offer.
- The system may help with more efficient resource allocation by preventing the holding of multiple places, ensuring that school places are allocated promptly.
- Requiring local authorities to include an explanation of the stages in the process of applying for a school place in their prospectus ensures that parents and learners have clear information about the new admission arrangements.

However, we also think that there are potential disadvantages of the proposals:

- Parents may perceive the limitation to one school place offer as a loss of choice.
- While the proposal asserts that the co-ordinated scheme does not remove the autonomy of governing bodies in admission decisions, there may be concerns among these bodies about the potential impact on their ability to manage their admissions independently.
- Placing a duty on local authorities to formulate and implement the co-ordinated admission scheme might pose challenges in terms of enforcement, particularly if any authority resists the change or struggles with the resources to comply fully.

We think that by applying the scheme to all authorities creates a uniform, co-ordinated admission scheme and would ensure consistency in the application process. This could lead to a common experience for parents and learners across Wales, making it easier for them to understand and to navigate the admission system.

Although there may be potential initial financial implications for local authorities to introduce the new arrangements, we feel that overall, the proposals would lead to a reduction in costs and time spent dealing with appeals to admission arrangements.

We feel that careful consideration needs to be given to the implications on giving one school place offer to parents, if their first choice of Welsh medium school is not available and their second choice is not a Welsh medium provision.

## Consultation questions

**Question 1** – Do you agree with the proposal to place a requirement on local authorities to co-ordinate admission arrangements for all maintained schools in their area?

<b>Agree</b>	✓	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Question 2** – What do you consider to be the benefits, or disadvantages, of co-ordinated admission arrangements?

The proposed co-ordinated admission scheme in Wales has the potential to address certain inefficiencies and uncertainties in the current system. However, careful consideration is needed to ensure that it serves the best interests of parents and learners, while respecting the autonomy of governing bodies.

There are a range of potential advantages:

- The co-ordinated admission scheme intends to streamline the admissions process, and this could reduce the time and effort spent by both parents and admission authorities.
- The co-ordinated admission system may decrease the number of appeals, as parents would be limited to one offer.
- The system may help with more efficient resource allocation by preventing the holding of multiple places, ensuring that school places are allocated promptly.
- Requiring local authorities to include an explanation of the stages in the process of applying for a school place in their prospectus ensures that parents and learners have clear information about the new admission arrangements.

There are potential disadvantages:

- Parents may perceive the limitation to one school place offer as a loss of choice, though we would anticipate only a small number of parents would be affected by this.
- While the proposal asserts that the co-ordinated scheme does not remove the autonomy of governing bodies in admission decisions, there may be concerns among these bodies about the potential impact on their ability to manage their admissions independently.
- Placing a duty on local authorities to formulate and implement the co-ordinated admission scheme might pose challenges in terms of enforcement, particularly if any authority resists the change or struggles with the resources to comply fully.

**Question 3** – Should the requirement to develop a scheme for co-ordinated admission arrangements apply to all local authorities or only to certain local authorities in Wales? If the latter, to which local authorities should it apply?

<b>All local authorities</b>	✓	<b>Certain local authorities</b>	☐
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**Supporting comments**

The decision on whether the co-ordinated admission scheme should apply to all local authorities or only certain ones involves a trade-off between consistency and flexibility. Careful consideration should be given to the potential impact on local autonomy and equity. However, applying the scheme to all authorities creates a uniform co-ordinated admission scheme and would ensure consistency in the application process. This could

lead to a common experience for parents and learners across Wales, making it easier for them to understand and to navigate the admission system. It would also mean that all learners, regardless of their location in Wales or the size of the local authority, would be subject to the same admission process. This could promote fairness and equal access to educational opportunities across the country.

**Question 4** – Do you consider that the proposed regulations will result in any additional costs for local authorities or schools? If yes, please provide further details of these costs.

Yes	✓	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

The introduction of a national co-ordinated admission scheme could potentially result in additional costs for local authorities at a time when local authorities are facing major financial challenges and cuts to their core services. This may mean that enacting any of the proposals would be difficult in the short term.

- Local authorities would likely need to invest in training staff and may need to update systems to implement the new co-ordinated admission scheme effectively.
- Informing parents, schools, and other stakeholders about the changes in the admission process will require a communication campaign, for instance creating informational materials or conducting meetings. All of which could incur costs.
- The collaboration and communication between local authorities, and between local authorities and schools with their own admission arrangements, may result in increased costs, such as those associated with coordinating and sharing information. For example, the proposed Education (Co-ordination of School Admission Arrangements and Miscellaneous Amendments) (Wales) Regulations 2024, places a duty on the ‘home’ local authority to ‘forward details of the application to the maintaining authority, together with any supporting information provided by the parent’ to a maintaining local authority. Also, the proposed regulation (2024) places a duty on the local authority to provide ‘the application, and any supporting information provided by the parent’ to schools where the governing body (or the body with whom the governing body has made arrangements) is the admission authority.

**Question 5** – Do you consider that the proposed regulations will result in any savings for local authorities, schools, parents and carers? If yes, please provide further details of these savings.

Yes	✓	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

The proposed admission scheme has the potential to create cost savings for local authorities.

- The scheme aims to streamline the admissions process, and with a standardised approach, authorities may spend less time and resources managing the overall admission process.
- As the scheme intends to prevent the holding of multiple offers by parents, school places could potentially be allocated more promptly, and there would be less uncertainty regarding available spaces. This efficiency could result in cost savings related to resource management.
- If the co-ordinated scheme leads to a reduction in the number of appeals, local authorities could save on the costs associated with managing and responding to appeals.

**Question 6** – Do you agree that the local authority should be required to include in its composite prospectus a summary of the local authority’s co-ordinated scheme each year alongside a clear explanation of the stages in the process of applying for a school place?

<b>Agree</b>	✓	<b>Disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**Supporting comments**

Requiring local authorities to include of a summary of the co-ordinated scheme in the prospectus, along with an explanation of the application process, would be beneficial.

- Including information about the co-ordinated scheme in the prospectus provides transparency for parents. This would allow them to understand the process and criteria for school admissions, making informed decisions about their preferences.
- Clear and accessible information in the prospectus could help in reducing any uncertainty, ensuring that parents have the necessary details to navigate the application and appeals process.

However, while including information is important, ensuring that the summary is clear and accessible is crucial. The language used should be easily understandable for a wide audience to avoid confusion. Care should be taken to strike a balance in the amount of information included. Too much information might overwhelm parents, while too little may leave them remaining confused.

In addition to the prospectus, local authorities could consider using other communication channels, such as websites and/or social media, to ensure that parents have a range of ways of accessing the information.

**Question 7** – What, in your opinion, would be the likely effects of the proposed regulations on the co-ordination of school admissions arrangements on the Welsh language? We are particularly interested in any likely effects on opportunities to use the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English.

Do you think that there are opportunities to promote any positive effects?

Do you think that there are opportunities to mitigate any adverse effects?

## Supporting comments

The regulations should emphasise clear communication and transparency, including sharing all information in both Welsh and English. This could lead to better understanding among parents, including those who primarily speak Welsh. This would align with efforts to promote Welsh language usage and accessibility.

There are also potential negative impacts to the Welsh language if local authorities only offer one school place to parents, especially if parents or carers choose a Welsh medium school as their first preference and an English medium school as a second preference. The local authority must ensure that parents or carers have access to the language medium of choice for their child. Often, if for example, parents/carers aren't offered the most accessible Welsh medium school because of over-subscription, they may opt for an English medium school for their second preference. These decisions by parents/carers are often determined by accessibility and many local authorities are still working towards equity of access to Welsh medium education.

**Question 8** – In your opinion, could the proposed regulations on the co-ordination of school admissions arrangements be formulated or changed so as to:

- have positive effects or more positive effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English; or
- mitigate any negative effects on using the Welsh language and on not treating the Welsh language less favourably than English?

## Supporting comment

The arrangements need to make clear that local authorities, where applicable, ensure that parents can choose the language medium of school they want for their children. It would be useful if the arrangements placed a duty on local authorities to contact parents or carers where their first-choice Welsh medium school is not available, even if they state a different language medium of school as their second preference, to ensure that all options of Welsh medium education are considered for them.

**Question 9** – We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

1.

Under the proposed Education (Co-ordination of School Admission Arrangements and Miscellaneous Amendments) (Wales) Regulations 2024, the 'Requirements of a Qualifying Scheme' 1 (g) provides that 'any notification of acceptance of an offer of admission of a child to a maintained school must be received by the local authority within 2 weeks after the date of the offer of admission of a child to a maintained school under the qualifying scheme'.

Giving parents only two weeks to respond could have several negative effects. Parents may have work or personal commitments that make it challenging to focus on such an important decision within a two-week period. This may be exacerbated if family is dealing with issues,

such as illness. Families away from school or the country completely, for example those visiting another country for religious observance, may miss the window altogether.

2.

While section 5 of the proposed Education (Co-ordination of School Admission Arrangements and Miscellaneous Amendments) (Wales) Regulations 2024 identifies the duties of a governing body under a qualifying scheme it has no clear timescales. It notes that a 'qualifying scheme must require a governing body who is the admission authority for a maintained school: to forward to the local authority in whose area it is situated details of any applications made directly to the maintained school in the normal admission round or as a late application, and any supporting information provided by the parent regardless of whether the parent making the application resides in that local authority's area'.

The lack of a clear timescale could impact negatively on the prompt transfer of information to local authorities and so hinder them in being able to make timely decisions about school places.

3.

It is likely that there will continue to be a number of parents who reside on the borders between two local authority areas that will continue to hold multiple offers in different local authority areas and therefore different admission authorities. The proposals do not currently give any consideration to this.

Responses to consultations are likely to be made public, on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to remain anonymous, please tick here: