

Priorities for the Children, Young People and Education Committee: response from the Bevan Foundation

1. The Bevan Foundation develops new ideas based on sound evidence to make Wales fair, prosperous and sustainable. It is an independent, non-aligned charity. In the last two years it has made a significant contribution to public policy in Wales on:
 - the outlook for the Welsh economy, employment and skills by 2020;¹
 - how to reduce poverty and inequality;²
 - progress towards reducing inequality and human rights abuses.³
2. We are grateful for the opportunity to submit our views to the Committee.

Education, Attainment and Skills

3. While attainment of school leavers in Wales has been rising for several years, the rate of increase has been slow. There is also a lower rate of pupils receiving the highest (A*-A) grades at GCSE and A Level compared to England, and a persistent gap in attainment levels between girls and boys. Attainment gaps are also evident between children and young people from different ethnic backgrounds, those who are eligible for free school meals and those who are not, and those who have a statement of special educational needs and those who do not. These gaps appear throughout children and young people's progression through school in relation to attainment, as well as absenteeism.
 - **Inequality in attainment levels is a major barrier to social mobility and should be a key focus of the Committee's work.**
4. There has been a decrease in the number of pupils leaving school without five A*-C grade GCSEs, but the findings of our 'Wales in 2020' report showed that approximately 71,000 young people will have left school without obtaining this between 2015 and 2020. Their prospects in a changing labour market are severely limited, and support from welfare benefits is unreliable with housing and living costs of young people set to be dramatically cut. These young people will join the 40 percent of adults with qualifications below level 2, whose lack of qualifications also makes adjusting to rapid changes in the jobs market very difficult.
5. Inequality is also an important factor. At present, 68% of pupils receiving Free School Meals do not achieve five A*-C grade GCSEs.
 - **The Committee should explore what further efforts are needed to raise attainment for those at greatest risk of leaving school with fewer than 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C, including looking at the Pupil Deprivation Grant and the potential for mandatory professional development in 'what works' in closing the attainment gap.**

6. As well as increasing the skills held by the workforce, at all levels and at all stages of working life, Wales also faces the challenge of increasing the skill requirements of the economy.⁴ The Bevan Foundation is intending to investigate how to enhance opportunities for young people who do not achieve 5 good GCSEs including improving outcomes from apprenticeships. We have real concerns about the operation of the UK Government's Apprenticeship Levy in Wales and the future of apprenticeship funding in Wales post-Brexit.⁵

- **We recommend that the Committee's priorities on youth skills in the next term should be to examine the adequacy of skills provision for young people leaving education without 5 good GCSEs. While this should take into account apprenticeships and other opportunities available through further education, the Committee should also explore the potential for a youth jobs programme and a youth volunteer programme which offers a 'cost of living' allowance.**

Childcare and Parenting

7. Childcare has been identified as one of the key rising costs which are faced by families living in poverty and the availability of childcare can serve as a barrier to parents seeking employment. Difficulties with finding adequate and affordable childcare are often greater for parents of children with disabilities, lone parents, those living in rural areas and/or with limited transport options. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has identified childcare as a key area for reform in its strategy to solve poverty. It recommends that the quality, coverage and affordability of childcare and early years education should be increased considerably to support parents who are in work or looking for work, training or education, and advises that additional childcare should be available for free to low-income families.⁶

- **We recommend that the Committee should consider all the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's recommendations in regard to childcare for two, three and four year olds in all areas of Wales, in a variety of childcare settings, particularly in regard to low-income households, a national framework for children with SEN and disabilities, and the potential for a social enterprise business model for childcare providers in Wales.**
- **We would like the Committee to explore how families, employers and schools can work together to increase the availability of quality childcare.**
- **We would also like the Committee to consider if the support the Welsh Government gives to parenting programmes should be extended, and if there should be a specific emphasis on good parental mental health, as recommended by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.**

8. We would welcome the opportunity to submit evidence on these matters in future.

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- ¹ Bevan Foundation (2015) [*The Shape of Wales to Come: Wales' economy, environment and society in 2020.*](#)
- ² Bevan Foundation (2015) [*Proposals for a National Programme to Spread Prosperity and Improve Life Chances by 2020*](#)
- ³ Bevan Foundation for Equality and Human Rights Commission (2016) [*Is Wales Fairer?*](#)
- ⁴ Felstead, A., Davies, R. and Jones, S. (2013) [*Job skills, qualification use and training in Wales: results from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012. WISERD*](#)
- ⁵ Bevan Foundation (2016) [*Tax for Good*](#)
- ⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016), [*We can solve poverty in the UK*](#)