

Overview

During this very difficult period, we have kept true to our vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning. The OECD for transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have been at the heart of our work.

The service in its entirety has re focused several times during this period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. The ability to be flexible and agile and to work effectively together in different teams, often cross sector, has had significant impact on organisational behaviour and external perception. At the heart of the refocusing has been the need to ensure that the well-being of school leaders, their staff and learners is paramount to the decision-making and ensuring that the right level of support, operational or professional, can be directed accurately by the service. Regular contact with school leaders has been well received and has contributed to Head teachers feeling that they could turn to a professional colleague to share challenging issues and to find solutions to address day-to-day issues. These included operational discussions on opening school safely as well as professional discussions regarding distance and blended learning.

Weekly staff meetings have contributed to a consistency of approach in ensuring common messages to school teachers and leaders. There has been a strong emphasis on modelling appropriate and supportive behaviour throughout the period. This has included very regular contact with headteachers to ensure that they get the appropriate support to operate effectively and also as a sounding board to support their own well-being. Further support for senior leaders well-being is planned through a series of workshops and webinars which will support their resilience during this difficult period.

We see ourselves as a partnership organisation, more so during the lockdown period and will be in going forward. We see ourselves as a leading partner, a supportive partner, a partner leading from the middle. Lateral leadership and nuanced leadership are some of the traits that we have exhibited during this challenging period. We have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. We have worked consistently as four regions with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources on distance learning and blended learning advice, on assessments and continuous assessment, and this has been well received by stakeholders. It has also strengthened the working relationship between those parties with positive professional exchanges, ensuring that the stakeholders were getting quality advice and resources.

A lot of time and energy was put in place to contact international experts and to research international practice to inform ourselves on the principles of effective distance and what successful blended learning should look like through an extended period. Discussions with international colleagues including OECD have deepened our thinking and allowed a richer and broader better experience for learners as time has gone on. This learning has been developed into very effective blended learning that has allowed schools to provide a range of experiences for their learners through detailed planning and effectively engaging parents in partnership to support their children. Excellent blended learning resources will be a very strong platform to further develop the conversation around how an effective series of learning experiences will inform discussion about what a new curriculum for Wales will look like for their schools.

One of the main strengths or the main strength of work across North Wales has been the consistent messaging from the six local authorities through their political education portfolio holders and directors working with ourselves to have one common message for the schools in North Wales. This consistency of messaging has been not only welcomed by schools but also by teacher unions and non-teaching unions who welcomed the clarity of messaging and support for their staff.

Appendix 2

One such example is the operational group of local authority and regional staff working on and developing risk assessments policy, advice and guidelines, and creating a regional dashboard which is a strong foundation for all schools to be able to reopen with risks being identified and locally managed and supported.

Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance and blended learning. This joint work facilitated by GwE staff has been very successful and sets a very strong infrastructure in place for future work and working relationship across the region.

One noteworthy aspect of our work has been bespoke nature of support for teachers and schools. We have worked on the strengths of individuals within the team and redeployed them where they have provided the maximum impact in their roles in supporting individual local authorities, schools, clusters, subject and phase networks.

This bespoke provision of support based on strong principles of collaboration, exchanging and sharing and developing the best practice is a key learning principle that we will continue to develop in the next stages of evolving the service.

Schools who were causing concern prior to lockdown have a clear and targeted support to help them through this difficult period. This has been at several levels including network support, support to senior leadership and middle management in those schools and support with provision of distance and blended learning. Schools that have found the lockdown and post lockdown period difficult due to staff having to self isolate have been supported in various ways. This has included modelling of exemplar materials, webinars, shared materials and resources. Also, GwE staff directly leading, directly teaching in schools or providing distance learning to learners.

During the lockdown period and we have continually reflected on the effectiveness of our work. We have used internal and external resources to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of our work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure.

We have produced a series of reports that we have shared with the Management Board and the Joint Committee from the beginning of the lockdown period to the present. These reports include the views of schools, staff and local authorities on the effectiveness of regional practice. Each report describes the quality of the provision and identifies areas for improvement to drive the learning agenda forward.

We have also adopted a regional approach to accelerating learning, working on a tri-level approach which includes universal support led by the consortium, targeted support jointly led by the consortia and the local authority, with the acute being the responsibility of the local authority. This work has been developed on an evidence base approach working closely with Bangor University and regional staff to ensure a range of high-quality resources to support physical and emotional wellbeing, literacy and numeracy, these being made available to all learners across, all age range in all schools. The impact of this work will be captured through a regional dashboard which will include all grants made available to schools by Welsh Government during this financial year.

Main outcomes and impact

- GwE knows its schools very well and recognises the support that is required to help schools support their learners most effectively.

Appendix 2

- Effective collegiate and collective regional approach between the six local authorities and GwE.
- Joint working has ensured strong governance and regional consistency in support, messaging and guidance given to schools.
- Strengthened collaboration between peers at a cluster/forum level has ensured effective co-constructed strategic thinking and direction.
- Clear regional and local approach in place for effective repurposing of both the service and its schools.
- Schools are well informed and confident that effective support is available should any needs arise.
- School leaders' wellbeing supported through regular and clear communication.
- Clear guidance given on how to prioritise and structure both Distance and Blended Learning;
- Schools supported with developing their curriculum that allowed opportunities for staff to be creative and offered a broad range of experiences for all learners in partnership with parents/carers.
- Schools provided with coherent guidance and resources to effectively support vulnerable learners with their wellbeing, engagement and learning.
- Best practice being shared across schools and clusters, i.e., engaging with reluctant learners and families, digital platforms and communication systems, blended learning models, etc.
- Effective use of digital technologies and digital skills of our workforce.

Collaboration

- Building on strong investment in cluster working and collaboration.
- Facilitation of sector and cross-sector cluster collaboration to support schools through the four phases.
- Facilitation of meetings for teaching and learning leads and subject networks to discuss distance and blended learning approaches (PISA style).
- Collaboration with head teachers and LA Officers via strategic forum meetings.
- Collaboration with LA officers via local standards group.
- Facilitation of co-construction of blended learning models.
- Collaboration with middle tier partners.
- MoU between GwE and Bangor University signed off.

Work undertaken from March – present

Phase 1: Pre-lockdown

- Communication strategy agreed with Directors of six local authorities.
- Regular phone contact with each school through SIA to support head teachers to keep schools open and assuage concerns.
- Deploy GwE staff in schools and PRUs where identified to support them to stay open.
- Deploy GwE staff in the authorities to support them with essential services.
- GwE teams upload initial resources to a designated Google classroom to support schools with initial planning for distance learning.

Phase 2: Supporting schools at the beginning of lockdown

- Keeping regular contact with schools in order to ensure health and wellbeing of both staff and pupils.
- Continuing to support individual schools or Hubs when there was a shortage of staff to attend.
- Upskilling of GwE staff for digital learning.
- Developing guidance, support and learning resources for schools to begin to support distance learning in schools.
- Supporting schools with Digital Learning and producing useful 'How To' videos so that teachers can develop and vary their distance learning methodology.

Phase 3: Distance Learning (DL)

- Developed distance learning guidance for schools in collaboration with other regions.
- Initially, google classrooms populated with appropriate materials and ideas for all Key Stages to refer to.
- Support to enable leaders and teachers to act in line with best practice in creating and using online learning resources.
- Effective DL Models were developed in GwE and were shared nationally and adopted by all regions.
- Schools, leaders and teachers were encouraged to share resources across the system and to encourage schools to use Hwb to share their approaches, plans and learning resources.
- Ensured all learners have an equitable access to learning and learning resources.
- All SIAs to have appropriate Professional Learning as to what makes effective DL.

Phase 4: Supporting schools to re-open

- Joint work with 6 Local Authorities.
- Establish clear lines of communication with key stakeholders.
- Weekly meetings with Directors and Education portfolio holders.
- Created a Policy Framework and Dashboard.
- Modelled risk assessment for each sector.
- Regional and local roles identified in supporting vulnerable learners.
- Upskilled GwE staff to support school leadership in these areas.

Phase 5: Blended Learning

- Upskilling of GwE team with international research on blended learning.
- Naturally blending CfW into current practice.
- Multi-disciplinary units to consolidate and develop skills.
- CAGs / Qualifications / Exams.

Phase 6: Accelerating Learning / RRRS

- Regional approach to Accelerating Learning / RRRS – included Physical wellbeing; Emotional wellbeing and Literacy and numeracy.
- Evidence based approach based on research.
- Triangle of need – GwE leading the universal, GwE and Las targeted and LAS leading the acute.