REPORT TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE

24 FEBRUARY 2021

Report by: **Alwyn Jones - GwE Assistant Director**

Subject: **GwE Work Programme and Priorities**

1.0   Purpose of the Report

1.1   To present an updated report to the Joint Committee members on GwE Work Programme for the Autumn Term 2020 and to outline our priorities in going forward.

2.0   Background

2.1   Since 23rd March 2020, the response to COVID-19 has dramatically changed our lives. In this challenging context, the education system and schooling has been significantly disrupted. During the Autumn Term, the level of disruption to schools varied considerably across the region, with some schools regularly having whole year cohorts self-isolating at home for an extended period, to others that were able to open to all pupils throughout the term.

2.2   Staff in the Local Authorities and GwE have continued to adapt their work, providing effective services and support for all their school communities during the COVID pandemic. During this very difficult period, GwE have kept true to their vision and values as an organisation that is continually learning. The OECD's transversal themes of Trust, Thinking together, Time and Technology have remained at the heart of the work with schools and partners.

2.3   The service in its entirety has re focused several times during the COVID period to meet the needs of the range of stakeholders. 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.

3.0   Considerations

3.1   GwE sees itself as a partnership organisation, especially with the Local Authorities and even more so during the lockdown period and in moving forward. One of the main strengths 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 GwE 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.

3.2   GwE have worked effectively with Welsh Government on policy and continuity of learning. It has also worked consistently with the other regions and with Estyn in preparing guidance and resources for distance/remote and blended learning and to provide advice on formative and continuous assessment.

3.3   The six local authorities and GwE have taken a collegiate and collective regional approach to supporting schools throughout the COVID pandemic. This was clearly demonstrated in the consistent regional approach in developing a supportive framework to ensure that all regional schools had the right policies in place together with a comprehensive risk assessment in order to create a safe environment to welcome the children back into schools.

3.4   Teamwork, joint working and collaboration has also been at the heart of the work with schools. All schools in the region are part of a cluster, alliance or a forum where they can come together to discuss operational issues as well as sharing best practice regarding distance/remote 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.

3.5   Schools who were causing concern prior to lockdown have had access to 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/remote and blended learning.

3.6   GwE have provided practical support for leaders to enable them to consider their whole school strategic planning of provision for distance/remote and blended learning, refine and evaluate their evolving provision and consider planning for various scenarios where pupils may be in school and / or at home over the coming academic year.

3.7   GwE is also supporting schools in evaluating the quality of their blended learning and distance/remote learning provision, sharing local examples and case studies of effective provision to reduce variation where it exists. Live streaming is developing well and enhancing the blended learning experience. Many schools acknowledge that parental engagement has been a key factor in securing effective distance/blended learning. GwE and the Local Authorities have provided a range of guidance to support school in improving parental engagement, including the sharing of good practice.

3.8   GwE 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.

3.9   The GwE Professional Offer for this academic year has been rationalised and concentrates on 5 main areas: Wellbeing, The Reform Journey, Developing the Workforce, Accelerating the Learning and Digital Learning. In addition, GwE will continue to facilitate cluster working to support the development of Curriculum for Wales, ALN Transformation and the Welsh Language.

3.10   During the COVID period GwE has continually reflected on the effectiveness of the work. Both internal and external resources have been used to ensure that we have a balanced perspective on the quality of the work. This has included working with the Education Development Trust and Steve Munby to develop the organisation and plan our future infrastructure. GwE is currently working with Professor Graham Donaldson to develop a range of think pieces to support schools in implementing the new curriculum.

3.11   Documented activities and time spent, together with a summary of activities, outcomes and impact are outlined in Appendix 1. The work programme for GwE officers for the spring term is also outlined in Appendix 1.

3.12   The work programme and our priorities will be reviewed continually to respond to the Covid-19 situation and government guidance and regulations and agreed with the GwE Management Board and Joint Committee. The work programme and its mode of delivery will also be discussed and agreed with Head teachers and schools.

4.0   Recommendations
4.1   The Joint Committee is asked to approve the content of the report, the GwE work programme and draft priorities for 2021-22 which will be reviewed continually to respond to the Covid-19 situation and government guidance and regulations.

5.0   Financial Implications
5.1   There are no financial implications arising from this report.

6.0   Equalities Impact
6.1   There are no new equalities implications arising from this report.

7.0   Personnel Implications
7.1   There are no new personnel implications arising from this report.

8.0   Consultation Undertaken
8.1   Consultation with the GwE Management Board and GwE Joint Committee.

9.0   Appendices
9.1   Appendix 1 - Updated report on GwE work programme

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OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

Monitoring Officer:
Nothing to add from a propriety perspective.

Statutory Finance Officer:
I appreciate that the work programme has been reviewed to respond to the Covid-19 situation, and that this has been planned thoroughly, inclusively, and to be delivered within GwE's existing resources.