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Welsh Government
Consultation – summary of response

Co-ordinating school admission arrangements

Consultation on co-ordinating school admission arrangements

March 2024

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Overview

This document provides a summary of responses to the consultation on co-ordinated school admission arrangements. New Regulations will place local authorities under a duty to formulate a scheme for co-ordinating admission arrangements for maintained schools, (except special schools and nursery schools, but including boarding schools), within their area.

Action required

This document is for information only.

Further information and related documents

Large print, Braille and alternative language versions of this document are available on request.

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Additional copies

This summary of response and copies of all the consultation documentation are published in electronic form only and can be accessed on the Welsh Government's website.

Link to the consultation documentation: [Co-ordinated school admission arrangements](#)

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Introduction

Section 86(1) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (“the 1998 Act”) provides that local authorities must make arrangements for parents to express a preference for a school. Local authorities fulfil this duty by issuing parental information which includes details of all schools in the local authority area and how to apply.

For community and voluntary controlled (VC) schools, the local authority is generally the admission authority, and the local authority therefore makes application forms available. For voluntary aided (VA) and foundation schools, the governing body is the admission authority. The local authority includes in its information for parents the oversubscription criteria related to the VA and foundation schools which provides an indication of the priority that would be given to applications for those schools. The local authority advises that parents should apply to those schools direct using a form to be provided by the school, which will normally request the submission of additional information relevant to the specific oversubscription criteria.

Section 86(2) of the 1998 Act provides that the admission authority must normally offer a place at the preferred school if there is a place available. The duty to offer the place therefore rests with the admission authority.

The consultation sought views on the Welsh Government’s proposal to introduce new Regulations to be made under section 89B of the 1998 Act for the co-ordination of school admission arrangements.

The Regulations will place local authorities under a duty to formulate for each school year a scheme for co-ordinating admission arrangements for maintained schools, (except school sixth form places, maintained special schools and maintained nursery schools, but including boarding schools), within their area. The first qualifying scheme must be formulated and adopted by 1 January 2025 and by 1 January for all subsequent years. The first qualifying scheme in 2025 will apply to admission arrangements in the 2027 to 2028 school year.

An associated amendment to the School Information (Wales) Regulations 2011 (“the 2011 Regulations”) is proposed to require the local authority to include in its composite prospectus a summary of the local authority’s co-ordinated scheme as determined each year, alongside a clear explanation of the stages in the process of applying for a school place.

Summary of responses

The consultation ran from 28 November 2023 to 23 February 2024. We received a total of 22 responses, 13 of which were from local authorities, 3 from primary schools, a member of the public and an unnamed response. A further four responses were from other organisations including the Catholic Education Services (CES), Estyn, UCAC and the National Secular Society. Of the 22 responses, 9 wished to remain anonymous.

A list of organisations that responded can be found at **Annex A**.

Most of the questions asked for an 'agree', 'disagree', or 'neither agree nor disagree' response, along with any supporting comments. Not all respondents answered every question. However, all responses that answered at least one question or provided comments on the proposals were considered. Percentages shown in each of the tables below are based on the number who responded to that particular question. This summary is not an exhaustive record of all the comments made, and the absence of a particular issue does not indicate that it has been ignored or is less important.

Analysis of consultation responses

In this summary we have grouped the analysis of consultation responses in the same way the questions appeared in the consultation document.

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?

	Number	Percentage
Agree	17	77%
Disagree	2	9%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	14%
Total	22	100%

A large majority (77%) of respondents agreed with the draft Regulations for the co-ordination of school admission arrangements.

Some provided supporting comments in favour of the approach, explaining how the proposal fits in with their current arrangements for co-ordinated admission arrangements and streamlines the process for parents/carers. Of the two respondents disagreeing, no supporting comments were provided.

Feedback received from schools confirms there are benefits in terms of reducing administration for schools that also provides certainty of pupil numbers by avoiding parents holding more than one school place.

Welsh Government response:

Having considered all responses in full and based on the percentage in agreement of the proposal and supporting comments, the Welsh Government intend to proceed to make these Regulations in accordance with section 89B of the 1998 Act.

Question 2

What do you consider to be the benefits, or disadvantages, of co-ordinated admission arrangements?

Most of the respondents provided a response to this question, giving a balanced opinion of the proposed co-ordinated arrangements proposal.

Comments include that these Regulations have the potential to address certain inefficiencies and uncertainties in the current system. However, Estyn added that careful consideration is needed to ensure that it serves the best interests of parents and learners, while respecting the autonomy of governing bodies.

Many respondents believe the proposal will streamline the admission process, which in turn could reduce the time and effort spent by both parents and admission authorities.

One respondent stated coordinated arrangements provide parents with a single school place offer for their child on the same day, and parents would not be holding more than one school place. The offer of multiple school places to parents denies parents places at schools preventing other children being offered these places.

It was also suggested that a co-ordinated approach provides a more equitable system of allocating places and would also free up time in terms of school administration.

Some of the disadvantages mentioned included the potential of increased workload for 'home' local authorities as they deal with the applications.

One local authority explained how the oversubscription criteria is very different between their local authority schools and each of their faith schools, with all of them having different oversubscription criteria. They added that if this process was centralised the local authority would still have to request the faith schools to allocate the rankings to the applications, as they do now, and this would add inefficiencies into the process.

Some smaller local authorities envisage an increase in workload, especially in areas where there is no issue with oversubscription.

In terms of governing bodies, Estyn believes, 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.

Welsh Government response:

We appreciate all comments from the respondents and have considered the benefits and disadvantages.

We would like to reaffirm the proposal will not remove the autonomy of governing body of a VA school or foundation school in respect of their admission arrangements and the decisions they take on who they admit. Our aim is to streamline the process and for the governing bodies to work with local authorities to ensure parents/carers receive one offer only.

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?

	Number	Percentage
All Local Authorities	16	73%
Certain Local Authorities	4	18%
No Response	2	9%
Total	22	100%

The majority of respondents (73%) confirmed it should apply to all local authorities, with some stating that applying the requirement to all local authorities will provide consistency across Wales. Some indicated that applying the requirements to only certain local authorities could cause confusion, particularly for parents/carers should they wish to move cross border or to other areas of Wales.

18% of respondents felt strongly the Regulations should only apply to certain local authorities. It was suggested that the requirements should only apply to those areas where schools are oversubscribed, and it is felt those areas without this issue would not benefit.

Welsh Government response:

Welsh Government recognises that there is potential for an increase in workload up front for some local authorities who have not adopted co-ordinated admission arrangements previously, and who would be establishing a newly formed co-ordinated admission scheme. However, this is based on the current position of admissions within each local authority which can change any given year. By undertaking the requirements set out in the draft Regulations, this will apply a consistent mechanism across Wales. A consistent approach will also limit any confusion for parents/carers.

Guidance will be provided to local authorities to support them in delivering the requirements, ahead of the necessary amendments to the School Admissions Code.

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.

	Number	Percentage
Yes	10	45%
No	10	45%
No Response	2	10%
Total	22	100%

Almost half of respondents considered the proposed Regulations will result in additional costs for local authorities.

Those who disagreed with the proposal (in question 1) suggested this would create extra work. One respondent suggested the proposal would increase administrative burden, with another suggesting this would result in the need for additional posts to be created to meet the requirements of the Regulations. Another suggested that in an area with a number of VA schools, an increase of applications is not sustainable with current resource, and an additional officer would be needed.

One respondent raised the difficulty in stating at this stage if or how much of an additional cost there would be, as there are already costs associated with the existing system, which would be expected to reduce with a streamlined approach.

A local authority, that supports a requirement for local authorities to co-ordinate admission arrangements and has had a scheme in place for a number of years, believes there is increased workload at the beginning of the admissions round for a local authority but that this is somewhat offset at the end of the process with less work involved in co-ordinating multiple offers made to parents. They added that co-ordinated arrangements speed up the admissions process and frees up valuable time and resources at schools.

Welsh Government response:

It is clear that some respondents believe there could be additional upfront costs differing for each local authority based on the number of schools and resources available. However, as acknowledged by some respondents, there are resources savings to be made with a co-ordinated system.

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.

	Number	Percentage
Yes	10	45%
No	10	45%
No Response	2	10%
Total	22	100%

45% suggested there would be no cost savings. Of those who answered 'yes', some stated there will be time and cost savings by lessening unnecessary appeal panels and chasing decisions.

One respondent stated they would expect a saving due to the co-ordinated scheme as it would lessen the work for local authorities, governing bodies and school staff in making offers and managing the uncertainty of parents/carers potentially holding multiple offers. Another respondent suggested a saving from a parent/carers' perspective, and only having to apply once via the local authority and not having to make multiple applications.

For one local authority who already works in the proposed way, there would be no change in terms of savings. However, opinions vary with some local authorities envisaging an added cost.

Welsh Government response:

The proposal will help ensure all pupils are offered a place promptly, with efficiencies for many local authorities and admission authorities in the long run. More importantly, it is expected the proposal will reduce uncertainty for parents and learners.

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?

	Number	Percentage
Agree	15	68%
Disagree	0	0%
Neither agree nor disagree	7	32%
Total	22	100%

For the majority of respondents who 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, there is a consensus parents should be well informed of the process and explained clearly.

Of the 32% neither agreeing or disagreeing, one of the respondents did not feel the need for a full composite prospectus. Instead, suggesting that a standard section for each local authority / VA school could be developed and shared. This is because they feel there will still be variations in admissions processes which may cause other coordination issues.

Welsh Government response:

In consideration of all responses to this question, and the intention to proceed with the making of these Regulations, the first qualifying scheme must be formulated and adopted by 1 January 2025 ("the first qualifying scheme") and by 1 January for all subsequent years (regulation 4). The first qualifying scheme will apply to admission arrangements in the 2027 to 2028 school year. Local authorities will therefore be required to include in their composite prospectus a summary of their co-ordinated admission arrangements for the first time during the 2026 to 2027 school year.

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?

The majority of respondents noted no response or no adverse effect to the Welsh Language. However, of those who provided a comment, some suggested that by coordinating the arrangements, parents/carers are more likely to consider Welsh medium education. One respondent pointed out that as the admissions function would be provided

by the local authority, the requirements of the Welsh Language Standards would apply, requiring all communication to be available through the medium of English and Welsh.

Estyn believes 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.

Potential adverse effects to the Welsh language as stated by some respondents include the situation where local authorities only offer one school place to parents, especially in certain situations where parents or carers choose a Welsh medium school as their first preference and an English medium school as a second preference. It was suggested that the local authority must ensure that parents or carers have access to the language medium of choice for their child.

Welsh Government response:

The Welsh Government has a duty to adhere and have due regard to the Welsh Language Standards, and appreciates the comments made. Decisions around school admissions are done so in accordance with each local authority's oversubscription criteria and the order of school preference as submitted by parents. Therefore, the responsibility still lies with parents to consider their order of preference carefully, which may or may not include Welsh medium provision. The principle right of parental choice does not change as a result of the proposal.

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?

The majority of respondents noted no response or no effect to the Welsh Language.

Of those who provided a comment, some believe the current admission arrangements do not treat the Welsh language less favourably than English and fully promote the Welsh language. It was suggested that a coordinated approach could make Welsh education opportunities more easily accessible to all children and young people in Wales.

Estyn suggested 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.

Welsh Government response:

Parental preference must be considered in accordance with admission authorities oversubscription criteria. Admission authorities have a duty to ensure the choices within the application form reflect any desire for their children to attend Welsh medium school. The Welsh Government does not consider these Regulations have any impact on the right of parental choice nor has any negative or positive impact of how Welsh language is treated

alongside English. Local authorities continue to have duties in respect of the Welsh Language Standards.

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:

Whilst the majority of respondents did not provide a comment for question 9, some of the comments received reiterated what has been mentioned with regards to smaller local authorities and the potential increase in workload.

One respondent highlighted the need for clear information and communication when the co-ordinated scheme is launched in Wales. This is to ensure parents/carers make an application to the local authorities and not directly to the VA schools. Clear communication for schools and local authorities will also be needed to ensure a smooth transition to a new system.

One local authority suggested mid-year applications should be included within the co-ordinated admission arrangements scheme with VA schools.

From a religious character perspective, one respondent expressed a concern that the consultation does not set out, or appear to have considered, how its recommendations may affect admissions relating to religious character. The recommendations should also require that non-religious belief is treated equally to religious belief, by making clear that access to secular schools will be protected.

Welsh Government response:

We are grateful for these comments and they have been fully considered but it is determined that these are out of scope of what the Regulations aims to achieve.

Guidance will be provided to local authorities to support them in delivering the requirements, ahead of the necessary amendments to the School Admissions Code. This guidance will be available online to assist parents in their understanding of the process. However, it will be for local authorities to include in its composite prospectus a summary of the local authority's co-ordinated scheme, alongside a clear explanation of the stages in the process of applying for a school place.

Next Steps

The Welsh Government would like to thank all those who took the time to respond to this consultation. Some minor technical changes have been made to the draft regulations. However, there is no change to the policy or legal affect as a result of those changes. All responses have been taken into account in developing the Education (Co-ordination of School Admission Arrangements and Miscellaneous Amendments) (Wales) Regulations 2024, made under section 89B of the 1998 Act.

The new Regulations will be laid to the Senedd.

Annex A – List of respondents

Ceredigion County Council
Powys County Council
Powys County Council - Governors Consultative Committee
Catholic Education Service (CES)
St. Michael's Church in Wales Primary School
National Secular Society
Newport City Council and all voluntary aided school governing bodies in Newport.
Estyn
Monmouthshire County Council
Pembrokeshire County Council
UCAC
Cardiff County Council - Chair of Cardiff Admissions Forum
Vale of Glamorgan County Council