Experiences of Blended and Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Wales: School and Stakeholder Evidence.

Title: Experiences of Blended and Distance Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Wales: School and Stakeholder Evidence.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

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Acronym/Key word	Definition
Blended Learning	Learning or teaching activity combining the use of technology with face to face teaching.
CfW	Curriculum for Wales
Consortia	Regional school improvement service. Including - ERW, GWE, EAS, CSC
Distance Learning	Any learning or teaching activity undertaken by pupils away from the school premises, including the use of synchronous or asynchronous online learning or paper based materials.
E-sgol	A blended learning initiative to deliver online teaching and learning opportunities using direct; real-time and interactive learning approaches. Using the range of tools and services available through Hwb, e-sgol provides support to schools around the skillsets and the range of pedagogical approaches needed to maximise learner's experiences.
EWC	Education Workforce Council
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HWB	Welsh Government online resource repository
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LEA	Local Education Authority
Lead partner school	School which leads a group of partner schools in an ITE partnership.
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher(s)
Partner school	School taking ITE students on placement.
PG	Postgraduate
PL	Professional Learning
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
UG	Undergraduate
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
WG	Welsh Government

1. Introduction/Background

Aim of the project

1.1 COVID-19 has forced a shift in learning and teaching in our schools. Although there was some prior experience with blended learning approaches and digital tools, the imposed distance learning environment presented both challenges and opportunities for learners, schools, parent/carers and bodies such as the Regional Education Consortia. The research project aim is for 3 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Aberystwyth University, University of South Wales, and Wrexham Glyndwr University), to capture the collective experiences of partner schools, learners, parents/carers, regional consortia and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students. The sample for this research was dictated by the terms of the call from Welsh Government and explores responses, capture experiences of practice and makes recommendations for the sector including what we can learn for ITE professional development and learning.

Initial research questions

1.2 The original project proposal had 8 initial research questions:

- RQ1: Is there a difference in schools understanding of blended learning?
- RQ2: What did different schools provide in terms of blended learning and distance learning during COVID-19?
- RQ3: What were the experiences of lead partnership schools and partner schools of the transition to blended learning?
- RQ4: What evidence of adapted good practice is available?
- RQ5: What strategies to develop and sustain engagement were considered effective by schools, learners and parents?
- RQ6: What are the challenges in providing blended learning? (Technology; skills; safeguarding)

- RQ7: How can HEIs prepare students to teach in a blended learning environment?
- RQ8: How do student teachers contribute to the work of their placements in schools in both face-to-face and online contexts?

1.3   The research questions underpinned our initial survey but as the project developed we followed a more inductive approach that met the research aim but allowed a more fluid exploration to capture the experiences of this challenging period in education

Responding to the changing context

1.4   The original project proposal and research questions focused on collecting data for the lockdown period from March 2020 – July 2020. However, the situation was an evolving one and the timeline was adapted as the research team took advantage of the opportunity to capture data during different COVID-19 periods. This added to the depth and richness of the data (further information on the timeline used for this study can be found in section 2.8). The table below broadly shows the different periods.

Table 1.1: The changing context

Date	Context
March 2020-July 2020	First national lockdown - Learners asked to stay at home
	Rapid need for a different model of learning and teaching
	Some schools became hubs for children of key workers
	Inexperience in distance learning
	Limited return to school in July 2020
September 2020-December 2020	Return to school in September 2020
	Not all learners returned to school due to concerns about COVID-19
	Local lockdowns in different parts of Wales
	December 20th – second national lockdown starts
January 2021-February 2021	Second national lockdown continues and learners required to stay at home (except children of keyworkers)
	Use of experience from first lockdown
	Planning challenges linked to uncertainty of when pupils will return

Terminology

1.5   Although we have provided a definition of distance learning, as noted in the glossary, other respondents may have a different understanding or interpretation of the term. Terms such as 'blended learning' or 'online learning' may have been used interchangeably by respondents within the data.

Literature review

1.6   The literature review is split into two sections: preparation for this research project which looked for existing studies in the use of distance, blended and remote learning in education and secondly reflections from literature and reports focusing on schools experience during the COVID-19 crisis.

Search terms and methods

1.7   The literature search used the following databases: EBSCOhost, Proquest Psychology Journals and Sage online. Search terms were chosen that reflected the different types of approach that schools had to engage with. The following search terms were used in combination: Remote learning; Blended learning; Distance learning; Technology enhanced learning; Responses to COVID-19. The searches explored all education contexts initially as there were very few studies in the school sector. However during 2020-2021 publications capturing the lived experience of schools appeared.

Initial literature review

1.8   The initial review found very few studies that explored remote learning or blended learning in school-aged education. There is a strong evidence base for university education and adult learners but whether the approaches are transferable to the school contexts must be considered. This corresponds

with review undertaken by Education Endowment Foundation (2020) Poirier et al (2019) and also Bowyer and Chambers (2017) evaluation of the blended learning. The initial review produced the following themes that informed the development of data collection tools**:**

- Exploring definitions of remote learning, distance learning and blended learning
- Understanding pedagogies that support remote and blended learning
- What approaches are suitable in different school sector environments?
- Access to appropriate technology
- Student engagement
- Professional learning for educators in distance and blended learning
- approaches
- Evaluating distance, remote and blended learning approaches

Reflections from the COVID-19 experience in the UK

1.9   Since the initial lockdown, guidance documents, reports and academic papers have been published in the UK and internationally to capture the experience and support schools in their approaches.

1.10   The documents consulted are grouped by the following themes: Guidance provided to schools in Wales; Teacher perspectives; Parental perspectives; Engagement; Digital divide; Impact; International experiences.

1.11   They are summarised below:

Guidance provided to schools in Wales from Welsh Government (WG), Consortia and Unions.

- **Central South Consortium (2020) Blended Learning Guidance**. A research informed document that focused on strategic questions to consider the implications of blended learning and include clear definitions of blended learning. The document explores each mode of learning, face-to-face, distance and online. The aim is to support the

well-being of practitioners in the region through providing research informed guidance on what works in blended learning. An emphasis on approaches led by pedagogy, consideration of staff and learner requirements and access for all learners. An important factor is that is acknowledges that different schools have different requirements

- **Regional School Improvement Consortia, Estyn, CSC, EAS, ERW, GwE (2020) Developing integrated approaches to support blended learning for the phased opening of schools.**
  Building on the learning guidance published by Welsh Government this guidance sets out best practice and approaches to blended learning to support practitioners. Settings and schools should build upon their distance learning. This document provides practical suggestions to support schools with their integrated approach to blended learning

- **Regional School Improvement Consortia, Estyn, CSC, EAS, ERW, GwE (2020)** *Models of Blended Learning.*
  This guidance builds on 'Developing integrated approaches to support blended learning for the phased opening of schools. The aim is to stimulate professional learning discussions on; teaching and learning approaches and effective feedback; planning learning experiences for learners; planning for those learners who might not fully engage or decide that a return to school is not appropriate for them at this time and effective communication between school and home. The guidance also considers implementation of the Curriculum for Wales (CfW) and managing learning during future lockdowns.

- **Welsh Government (2020)** *Guidance on learning in schools and settings from the autumn term*. **Welsh Government.**
  The purpose of this guidance is to give schools and supporting partners a common set of priorities for learning, regardless of the level of operations in response to COVID-19. Schools to prepare for a range of scenarios and this guidance sets out what learning priorities should remain constant throughout those: a single approach which is flexible enough to respond to changing conditions.

- **NASUWT CYMRU (2020)** *Remote Teaching and Learning – Arrangements Issues and Support.*
  This advice covers factors that schools will need to address when planning for and delivering remote education and blended learning. It also sets out what the NASUWT considers to be acceptable and unacceptable practice. It provides an overview of 'Defining remote education and blended learning' and its key messages cover realistic expectations, appropriate use of digital learning, the need to not monitor teachers' performance, training, professional recognition, addressing of workloads, privacy and data protection, flexible working, safeguarding and wellbeing of staff.

Teacher perspectives

- **Müller L-M and Goldenberg, G. (2020)** *Education in times of crisis: Teachers' views on distance learning and school reopening plans during COVID-19.* **Chartered College of Teaching.**
  This report presents findings from an online survey of nearly 1,800 members of the Chartered College of Teaching and discussions from six focus groups. Responses were collected between 7 May and 5 June 2020. The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' views on the impact of partial school closures on learning, wellbeing, school reopening plans and potential long-term implications for education.

Parental perspectives

- **Andrew, A. et al. (2020) Learning during the lockdown: real-time data on children's experiences during home learning. The Institute for Fiscal Studies.**
  In this report is based on a survey completed online by over 4,000 parents of children aged 4–15 between April to May 2020 in England. Key findings include; Primary and secondary students are each spending about 5 hours a day on average on home learning. Higher-income parents are much more likely than the less well-off to report

that their child's school provides online classes and access to online videoconferencing with teachers. Children from better-off families are spending 30% more time on home learning than are those from poorer families and have access to more resources. Many parents of both primary and secondary school students report struggling with supporting home learning. There are risks to widening inequalities.

Engagement

- **Lucas, M., Nelson, J. Sims, D (2020) Schools' Responses to COVID-19: Pupil Engagement in Remote Learning. National Foundation for Educational Research.**

  The report is based on findings from a national survey of 1233 senior leaders and 1821 teachers in publicly-funded, mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. Factors explored are access to IT, parental engagement, pupil engagement; support received from their schools. Key findings include; Teachers are were in regular contact with 60 per cent of their pupils. However, less than half of pupils (42 per cent) returned their last piece of set work. Limited pupil access to IT is a significant challenge. Despite high levels of leadership guidance and teachers' readiness to provide remote learning support, there is a substantial deficit in curriculum coverage across schools Teachers reported just over half (55 per cent) of their pupils' parents are engaged with their children's home learning. Teachers are concerned about the engagement of all their disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with limited access to IT and/or those who lack space to study at home.

Digital Divide

- **Education Policy Institute (2020) Addressing the digital divide in education-Enabling a blended learning approach for all pupils and teachers.**
  The document summarises a round table hosted by the Education Policy institute which explored experiences during the first England

lockdown from the perspective of school leaders. It considered international experience, supported the need for equal access for pupils and how to improve the transitions from the classroom to home.

Impact on learning

- **Cullinane, C and Montacute, R. (2020)** *COVID-19 and Social Mobility Impact Brief #1: School Shutdown.* **The Sutton Trust.** This brief looks at the issues facing school aged pupils, with views from both teachers and parents, including what has been provided by schools since their physical closure, the support pupils have access to at home, the physical and financial resources available to them (including technology, or other support such as private tuition), and the impact this has had on the schoolwork being completed in the home. It concludes by looking at possible mitigation strategies open to schools and the government, in order to try to reduce any impact on the already wide attainment gap between the richest and poorest pupils, and protect the prospects for long-term social mobility.

- **Sharp, C. et al. (2020) Schools' Responses to COVID-19: The Challenges Facing Schools and Pupils in September 2020, National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER).** This research investigates the impact of COVID-19 on mainstream primary and secondary schools in England and an earlier (NFER) survey of schools' responses to COV ID-19 in May 2020. The focus is on the challenges of returning to school in September 2020. Key themes are whether pupils are 'behind' in their curriculum learning and where additional support is required and the logistical and resource issues of returning to school, There is also a reflection on experience of remote learning during lockdown and blended learning from June 2021.

International Experiences

- **Centre on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) (2020) Lessons from Remote Learning in Six School Systems, Centre on**

Reinventing Public Education. Centre on Reinventing Public Education.

The CRPE tracked a sample of school districts to understand their approaches remote learning and the influence that the experience that this has for the start of the following academic year. The case studies included urban and rural areas in the Chicago area

- **Morgan, H. (2020) 'Best Practices for Implementing Remote Learning during a Pandemic', Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 93(3), pp. 134–140.**

  An evaluation of U.S. schools that have implemented remote learning in response to lockdown. It raises the issues of inequality as many schools were found not to have enough resources to provide learning opportunities for students, and not all pupils had internet access at home. The key message from the research was schools must develop approaches that are equitable for all learners.

Structure of the report

1.12 The report outlines the **Methodology** agreed by the three HEIs which was developed in line with the requirements of the research call. This is followed by **Findings** sections which explores the data by data collection approaches and is concluded with a summary which collates the data and responds to the research questions set. The **Main Findings** section identifies the key findings for the research. **Recommendations** for the consideration of WG, Schools, ITE providers and Consortia are presented at the end of the document.

2. Methodology

Choosing an approach

2.1   The methodology chosen for this research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods with a stronger emphasis on qualitative methods as the purpose of the study is to explore with participants the reality of learning and during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It sought to explore and understand their lived experience. Figure 1 is an overview of the methodological approach.

Figure 2.1: Overview of methodology
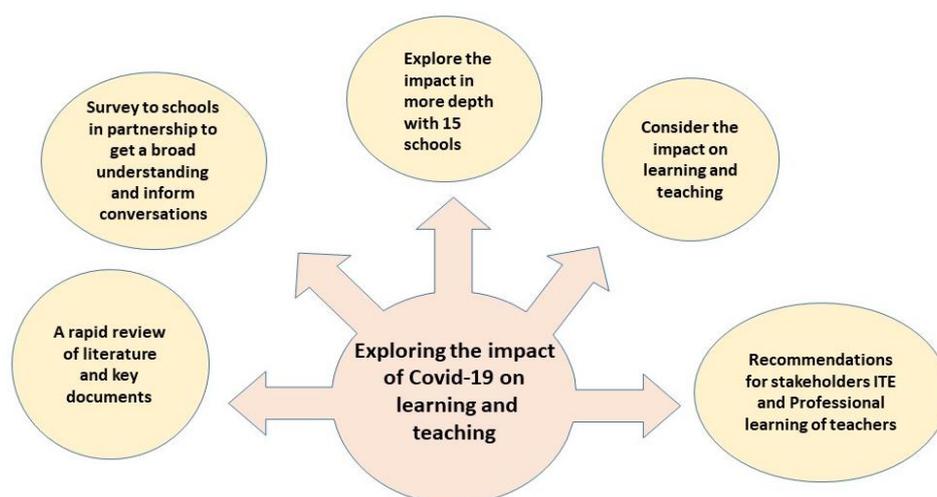
2.2   The research team wished to explore **with** the participants what their lived experience had been like. As a result of the changing landscape of the pandemic, the research team had to respond to schools when they were available and working with each school became a moving landscape at times due to changes in restrictions. A case study approach was used drawing on schools within the partnerships associated with each Higher Education Institution (HEI) involved in the project. Creswell (2013) contends that qualitative research is concerned with making sense of or interpreting phenomena and the meaning that people draw from the phenomena. The

qualitative data in this project explores the lived experience of a range of stakeholders regarding the approaches to distance/blended learning adopted, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic during school lockdowns.

2.3   Despite criticisms of a qualitative approach to research, due to its potential failure to produce generalisable findings (Hammersley, 2008), this research, through a case study approach, explores the journey of the participants through their experiences and sits comfortably within a predominantly qualitative study, as it within the participants' real-world practice, with data collected through a variety of sources. The research will enable the participants to describe their experience of distance/blended learning, revealed through their individual and unique stories.

2.4   A case study approach is useful when considering using the case to analyse a specific problem or to generate theory from the outcomes (Gray, 2018). In this project, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increased emphasis on distance/blended learning supports the use of a case study approach and as Creswell (2013) points out, a case study design is a qualitative approach where the researcher explores a real-life contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) using a variety of sources of information. In addition, a case study, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2013) relies on interviewing, observation and document analysis. Flick (2014) argues that case studies relate to a typical example or an instructive example of a more general problem and researchers need to define what else may belong to the case (p.122). For example, in studying the lived experience of a school, through a case study approach, a researcher needs to consider whether data from the school alone is enough. In this project data was collected from a range of stakeholders including; teachers, senior leaders, parents, pupils and Consortia.

2.5   Due to the changing nature of the pandemic and the constraints in place as a result, the research team concluded that carrying out interviews with teachers and parents may be more difficult to complete. Therefore, the team developed online surveys that could be emailed to teachers and parents to

gather further data as described by Flick (2014). This enabled the research team to continue to undertake the research throughout the evolving and constantly changing circumstances. It is important to note, that each time data was collected, it reflected a fixed period in time, relating to an unknown ongoing experience.

Ethical approval and consent

2.6   Ethical approval was sought from each HEI although the project was acknowledged as a collaborative venture. An agreed consent and information sheet was passed through each HEI ethics committee, as were data storage and management plans and each HEI granted ethical approval for the study and data generation described above. All documentation was made available bilingually and participants were asked for their language preference to complete their interview. Ethical considerations included ensuring to anonymise individual and school identifiers (codes known to each HEI were used) and the main project documentation being stored on one HEI secure cloud storage that was accessible to each of the research team. Current BERA guidelines were noted and adhered to at all points of the research.

Sample and phases of data collection

2.7   The first phase of data collection involved a systematic review of literature and a survey to partnership schools to enhance an understanding of areas of focus. The initial survey went to all partnership schools across the 3 universities and allowed the piloting of questions and areas that would be explore in more depth through interviews and focus group. The second phase with 15 schools (5 from each partnership) involved interviews, surveys and focus groups with schools across the HEI partnerships, interviews with regional consortia and focus groups with ITE students. The data was collected from all 15 schools, in some cases, due to participant workload and

availability, certain data sets were collected via either focus group or surveys with the same question set being used to ensure consistency in the responses received. Each HEI identified 5 schools from each partnership to work with. The sample frame for the research is the partnership schools of each HEI as stipulated in the WG research call. This provided engagement with urban and rural schools; Welsh medium schools and primary and secondary schools. There were no quality issues with the sampling frame. The sampling frame contain records for all the population that consented to be part of the research. It was agreed at the start of the project that responses from schools would be coded to project anonymity. The research tools were developed collaboratively by the cross HEI research team.

Figure 2.2: Participants

Data collection and project timeline

2.8   Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all data collection was online via Microsoft Teams. The research instruments were co-constructed across the HEI research team. Figure 2.3 below, provides further detail on the timeline for data collection. As discussed above, there was a need to adapt the timeline to fit in with participant availability and; therefore, certain data sets were collected across an extended period of time.

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Figure 2.3: Project timeline, data collection and analysis.

Nov 2020 Initial online survey sent to partner schools based on the initial research questions	→	Nov 2020 Teacher interviews started and continued until Jan 2021	→	Dec 2020 Senior Leaders interviews started and continued through until Apr 2021
Mar 2021 Tecaher surveys sent out due to the challenges of capturing date as a result of the changing context and second lockdown	←	Feb 2021 Data analysis	←	Date: Parental surveys sent out
Mar 2021 Start write up of final project report	→	Mar/Apr 2021 Consortia Interviews	→	Apr 2021 Research team finalise the report for Welsh Government

Data collection methods

2.9   Due to the changing context outlined in **Table 2**, data generation methods employed in this research depended on the circumstances at any given time and how participants could best engage in the research. For example data was collected from teachers by focus groups and survey tool using an identical question set. Table 2 is a summary of the different data collection methods and the respondents they were used with. The methods confirmed that a primarily qualitative approach was the most effective way to capture the lived experience.

Table 2.1: Summary of methods used with stakeholder groups

Participant	Method	Approach	Commentary
Schools	Initial survey	Mixed	Initial survey offered a baseline to get a sense of experience to design the follow-up research instrument
Parental Voice	Survey School based surveys	Mixed	Information from HEI and School based surveys offered opportunity to collect and compare data
Pupil Voice	Survey with parental consent	Qualitative	A simple 2 question survey to capture pupil voice in non-threatening manner
Senior Leader Voice	Interviews	Qualitative	Opportunity to explore themes in depth in a trusted environment
Teacher Voice	Focus group/survey	Qualitative	Opportunity to reflect and discuss in a safe environment
ITE Students	Focus group	Qualitative	Providing a voice for ITE students to reflect and share practice with ITE staff
Consortia Perspective	Interviews	Qualitative	Opportunity to discuss professional learning and cross-reference with the school experiences

Data analysis

2.10   The data analysis is based on an inductive approach (Thomas, 2006) to identify themes that are important to the participants. An initial coding exercise to explore themes was undertaken, with the data analysis for each data collection method allocated to members of the research team. Inductive analysis is illustrated through multiple readings of raw data in an attempt to condense the raw data into a summary and the drawing out of themes that

demonstrates the lived experience of the participants in this study. During the inductive analysis, the research team were mindful, as Thomas (2006) points out that the analysis should not become a set of expectations relating to specific findings. It is during the analysis phase that the research team recognised that the emerging themes were key to revealing the perceptions of the lived experience of the participants. For this reason, the findings in section 3 are presented through the emerging themes identified from each of the different stakeholder participants.

Reflecting on the approach

2.11   The initial survey was sent out to schools in November 2020 and the survey was informed by the research questions outlined in the **introduction in 1.2.** However, due to the ever-changing context of the research as a result of the different phases of the project, it became clear to the research team that the project needed to follow a more inductive approach to data collection. While a case study approach was still considered the most appropriate method for this study, the research team drew on the work of Ravitch and Riggan (2012) who contend that a conceptual framework is not simply lifted from a shelf but rather is created by the researcher(s) from multiple sources. The perception that researchers can pinpoint a single theoretical theory or framework is considered naive by Ravitch and Riggan (2012, p.7) and they argue that a conceptual framework can be viewed as an argument about why the topic being studied, is worthy of study, and why the methodological approach is appropriate (p.7).

Table 2.2: A representative sampling of categories

Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Constructivism	Interpretivism Phenomenology Hermeneutics	Phenomenological research	Interviews Surveys Theme identification Document analysis Conversation analysis

Source: Crotty, 1998, P.5

2.12   The consideration of a phenomenological perspective (Van Manen, 1997) further informed the conceptual framework for this research. Henriksson and Friesen (2012) describe phenomenology as the study of individual experience, particularly as it is lived and structured through consciousness and the use of a phenomenological approach in this instance supported the exploration of the lived experiences of those contributing to this research. Although a phenomenological approach is not without criticism and Finlay (2012) suggests that the 'subjective interconnection between researcher and the researched' (p.17) may devalue the outcomes of the research. Given that the research team in this instance are drawn from three HEIs across Wales and the lived experience is revealed by the participants in the research and therefore, not necessarily influenced by the researchers. However, in response to the potential intersubjectivity of researcher and researched, consideration was given to a hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

2.13   Hermeneutic phenomenology is underpinned by the work of Heidegger and Gadamer (Smith et al., 2009). Heidegger 'questions the possibility of any knowledge outside of an interpretivist stance' and suggests that an interpretivist stance is rooted in the lived world. (Smith et al. 2009, p.16). In contrast Hood (2016) explores the notion of a critical realist perspective as an approach to qualitative research. The overall driver for a critical realist perspective is described by Hood (2016) as adopting a pluralist approach

rather than a single framework, that offers more than one interpretive lens. Hood (2016) cites the early work of Bhaskar (1979, 2008) who proposes an ontology linked to three layers; the empirical, the actual and the real. Hood's (2016) uses critical realism and a qualitative lens to understand the nature of causation, agency, structure, and relations. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on the subjective experiences of the practitioners in this study (Kafle, 2011) and in doing so reveals the structure of their lived experience, though the different voices and interpretive lens.

2.14   The findings are based on the data collected by the 3 HEI and represent reflections across the school sectors and other identified stakeholders as shown in the Methodology section. The findings are organised by a discussion of the initial survey followed by reflections by each of the 'voices' talked to. The questions asked of each group were identified by a cross HEI discussion. The source of each quotation is provided at the end of each quotation and identified by school and role. It is important to note the data collection considers the impact of different situations that schools were in during the period March 2020-February 2021.

- Initial survey
- Parental and pupil voice
- Senior leader voice
- Teacher Voice
- ITE student voice
- Consortia voice

2.15   There are a number of limitations to the data captured in the course of the project and the findings should considered with these in mind. One is that the project was planned in response to the initial lockdown in March 2020 but the data was collected over a period of about six months (November 2020 to April 2021) during which the situation in schools changed rapidly and

frequently. The experiences reported by stakeholders are a mixture of reflection on past experience and a response to current challenges. The circumstances faced by schools during this period meant that sample was self-selecting; not all schools were willing to share the survey links with parents who were already dealing with the challenges of remote learning nor were teachers able to commit to interviews or focus groups. Other research projects, for example that conducted by Estyn, were drawing on the same population.

3.   Findings: Initial Survey

Introduction

3.1   An initial survey was sent out to schools in each of the HEI partnerships to explore their experience of Lockdown 1 and the return to school in September. 24 schools from across the partnerships responded (19 Primary and 3 secondary and two 3-18 schools). The respondents were 6 Headteachers, 6 Deputy or Assistant Headteachers; 4 Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members and 8 teachers. The mean number of years teaching experience was 17 years ranging from 5 to 27 years. Only 9 of the respondents had used distance learning with their learners

3.2   The survey was circulated in November 2020 and captures the experience of the first lockdown period and the return to school from September 2020. This information combined with the literature review formed the basis of the in depth discussions with case study schools and discussion with ITE students. The section ends with a summary linked to the initial research questions.

The prospect of delivering distance learning – initial reflections from schools

3.3   Respondents were asked to provide 3 words to describe their thoughts at the start of the lockdown in relation to delivering distance learning. There was strong sense of uncertainty and trepidation about such a significant shift with little time for preparation.

Figure 3.1: Initial thoughts
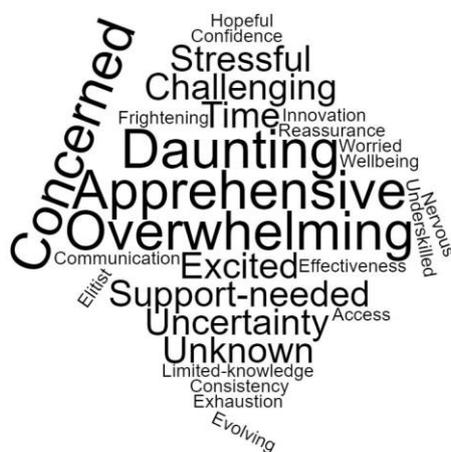
Managing distance and blended learning: March 2020 - November 2020

3.4   Schools were facing a very different learning and teaching environment during this period and had to manage periods of distance and blended learning. The survey asked questions about impact on workload, learning and teaching approaches and communication with learner and parents.

3.5   15 respondents said that the move to distance learning had a significant impact on their workload and this is explored in more detail in the focus groups and interviews. One respondent captured the feeling of the sample:

'it has been a challenging time and I feel our staff have really given a lot of time to developing their approaches, despite the demands of support their families throughout this period'

Figure 3.2: Approaches used to support distance learning

Supporting Distance Learning March 2020-November 2020

Category	Value
Other	2
Curriculum bulletins	4
Discussion boards	6
On-line discussions	13
Outdoor learning	14
Work sent to leaners	24
Access to on-line materials	24
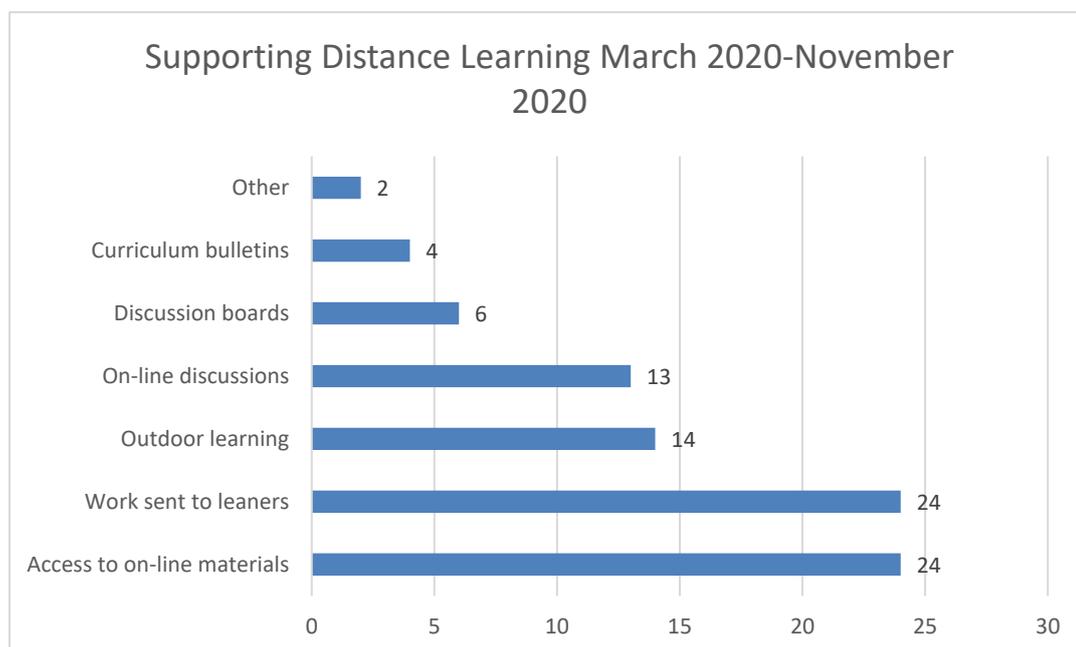
3.6   During this period, all respondents used a combination of the on-line materials and work sent to pupils. There was some use of on-line discussion tools. Approaches seemed to have been underpinned by a concern to support health and well-being. One of the respondents mention that the importance of phone call support under the category 'other' and this was cited by remaining respondents in other responses in the survey. Seventeen of the respondents noted how their approaches to distance learning had changed during the period March 2020-November 2020. The majority of respondents felt that they had an agreed whole school approach to distance learning.

Access to technology

3.7   Fifteen of the sample felt that they had appropriate technology to support distance learning. 4 felt unsure at this point and 4 did not feel that had sufficient access.

3.8   All the respondents felt that a good internet connection, access to appropriate hardware and awareness of apps were significant. Apps had

been thoughtfully chosen so that they were accessible to learners and their parents.

'Parents to see it as the same as going to school, not that this is optional'

Resources to support learning and teaching in a remote learning environment

3.9   Infrastructure and availability of applications to support learning and teaching was highlighted a success factor in the literature on blended learning and distance learning. Schools developed both paper based and online resources for their learners. There was equal weighting between use of HWB , education focused apps and educational websites.. Half of the respondents had a schools based learning environment and a small number of schools had their own intranet. In the first lockdown, email played a significant role in sending information to learners and also regular communication.

Figure 3.3: Technology to support learning and teaching

Technology to Support Learning and Teaching

- School Virtual Learning Environment: 12
- School Intranet: 4
- Education Apps: 21
- Hwb: 17
- Email: 15
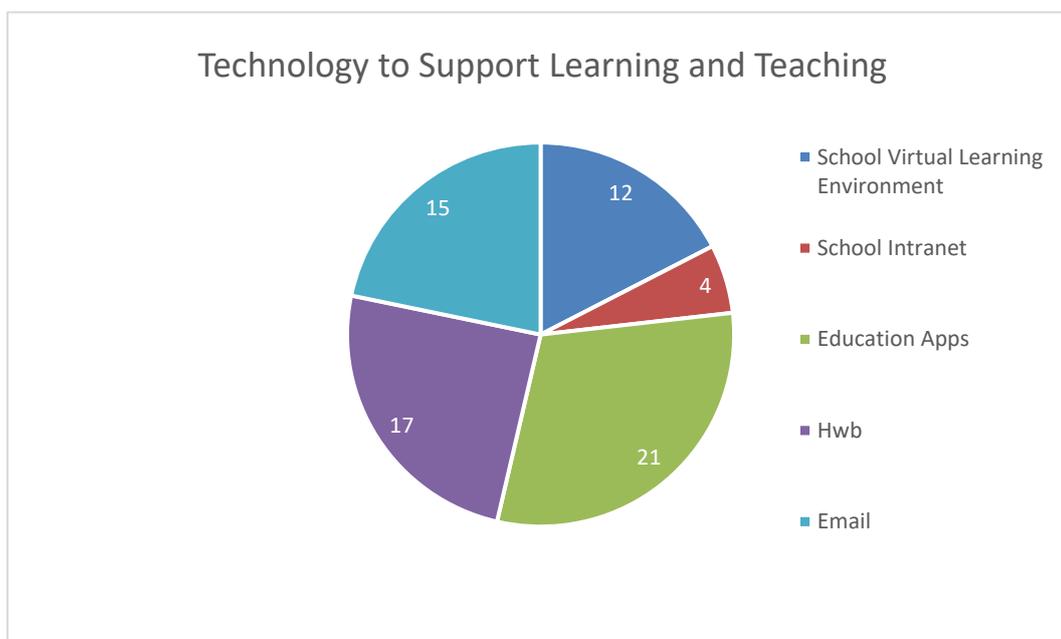
Curriculum apps

3.10   The extent of the use of curriculum related apps varied between schools. Some listed in excess of 17 examples. The table below shows areas of learning that the apps supported. There was a significant emphasis on the core development areas of literacy, language, mathematics and numeracy. Also in terms of developing digital skills a good range of coding apps.

Table 3.1: Curriculum apps by area.

Area	Apps
Literacy and Language	Pages, Puppet Pals, Office, Hoff Ganeuon Selog, Hoff Llyfrau Selog, Oxford Reading Buddies, Myon, Spelling Shed, DuoLingo, Nessy, Spelling Frame, Google translate, Say Something in Welsh, Shark, Word, Epic
Mathematics and Numeracy	Numbers, Office, Mathswatch, My Maths, Mathletics, BigMaths, Times Tables Rockstar,White Rose Maths,Sumdog
Creativity	Doodle Buddy, Padlet, Espresso, ChatterPix, iMovie, Minecraft Education, Garageband, Bitmoji
Coding	Bee Bot, Kodable, Purple mash, Scratch, Logo
Generic	Microsoft Office, Google Classroom, Google Drive, See-Saw, Quizlet, Kahoot, Keynote, Youtube, Show My Homework (Satchel one) Hwb

Reflections on the learner experience: March 2020 - November 2020

3.11   As with any learning environment, learners engaged in different ways. Some missed the school environment and the social contact with friends. One teacher observed that on the return to school learners appreciated the contact, resources and environment

3.12   The importance understanding the different types of learner was raised and the need for a variety of tasks.

'(learners)..needed the variety of tasks and the autonomy to choose… there was more engagement when able to choose the level of challenge and often pushed themselves to achieve higher level.'

3.13   Schools reported on the positive progress being made due to the remote learning resources.

> 'Nearly all Y1-Y6 have settled back into school. During remote learning, the majority of learners said that they had predominately completed maths and reading activities. This is evident from the standards seen. Many children who received support at home have made expected progress in reading. Art skills… have generally approved. All learners really enjoy being outdoors.'

3.14   Access to technology had an impact on whether the experience was a positive one and there were challenges particularly id more than one sibling at home. Parental involvement was also key:

> 'Depended wholly on parent engagement for my class since learners were not able to access independently. This who enegaed said that children enjoyed the activities but all would prefer to be in school and would benefit more from face to face learning'.

> 'I think learning remotely worked well for pupils that had supportive parents'

> 'Because they weren't in the classroom I think most children without strong parental support view it as a choice'

Responses to the transition to distance learning

3.15   Analysis of the initial data collection identified 4 themes about the transition to distance learning: Keeping in touch with vulnerable learners; engagement; access to technology and parental involvement.

Table 3.2: Response to transition to distance learning

Theme	Example
Keeping in touch with vulnerable learners	'Plant bregus yn derbyn galwadau ffon yn wythnosol. Os nad oes plant yn ymgysylltu galwadau wythnosol'
Engagement	'About half of our pupils engaged with distance learning during the first lockdown.'
	'Varied-some embraced it whereas others were very difficult to engage with.'
	'a rough guide of 70%
	'At the beginning, many pupils were regularly completing set work, although the number largely dropped towards the end.'
	'Very good at the start'
	'some pupils struggled to work at home'
	'Engagement was poor initially.'
Access to Technology	'Those who had the technology and effective internet were very positive.'
	'Lots of initial teething problems.'
Parental Involvement	'Very responsive. The majority of parents helped and supported their children to learn and kept in touch with me.
	'Some were very proactive… often depended on the time available to the parents to help and become familiar with the resources'
	'Many parents were saying that it was too difficult to get their child to do the work at home.'
	'Very support and appreciative'
	'We now balance the firm encouragement for parents to support their children at home with the needs to be aware of pressures and strains at home.'

Sustaining engagement

3.16   16 out of 24 respondents felt that the majority of learners had engaged with learning remote but all acknowledge the challenge of sustaining engagement.

Figure 3.4: Sustaining engagement

Sustaining Engagement

- A schedule for learners to follow — 15
- Regular contact — 18
- Signposting learners and parents to learning apps and websites — 12
- Interactive work with learners — 9
- Staff meeting virtually to share approaches — 11
- Setting outdoor tasks — 2
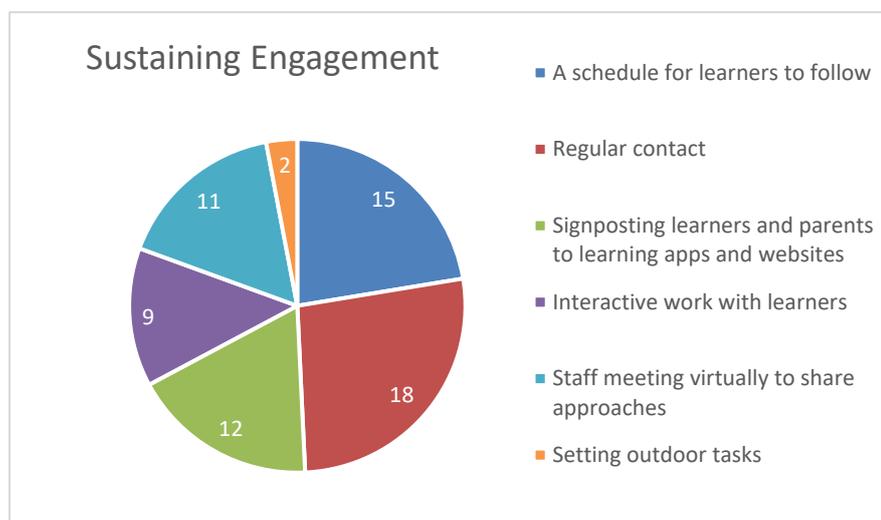
Communication with Learners and Parents

3.17   Communication with learners and parents was a key priority for schools and a variety of approaches was used. The most popular was phone calls, texts and social media. This was followed by email and using the school website. 11 of the respondent also produced a school newsletter. Schools also used apps like Class Dojo, See Saw, Teams and Google Classroom. Schools reported on the importance of regular and frequent communication with learners and parents. 12 respondents kept in touch with learners on a daily basis. 5 more than once a week and 5 weekly and 1 fortnightly at least depending on family need.

What was effective during the period: March 2020 - November 2020?

3.18   From the qualitative responses, 5 main themes around what was effective emerged: Personal communication with learners and parents; maintaining engagement; understanding the needs of learners and parents; use of technology to support learning and use of technology to support staff and parents.

Table 3.3: What was effective?

Theme	Example
Personal communication with learners and parents	'Checking in with learners'
	'Frequently offering support with wider aspects of learning and development'
	'On-going discussion with parents/learners to set tasks'
	'individual feedback on work and daily contact with parents through Class Dojo'
	'Communication to improve well-being'
Maintaining Engagement	'Varying the types of activities to maintain interest and engagement'
	'Whole school activities e.g. pass the rainbow staff video that inspired a lot of pupil activity'
	'Collecting, displaying and celebrating work online to encourage participation'
	'Constant feedback on submitted work'
	'Pupils are more engaged when then can see their teacher's face'
Understanding the needs of learners and parents	'Drawing on previous learning from class and making use of resources with which children were already familiar'
	'Open ended tasks allowing learner to undertake them in learning style that suited their circumstance/support'
	'Providing choices in activities which considered what resources might be available to learners and their families, offering accessible alternatives and making use of everyday objects and routine'
	'Accompanying brief activity outlines with more detailed outlines to support parents with different levels of understanding'
	'Home visits delivering materials to vulnerable families'
	'Providing tasks in a paper-based and online format so accessible to all'
Use of technology in support learning	'Improved use of google classroom'
	'Cyflwyno Dysgu Byw o ddisgyblio'
	'Seesaw during lockdown to post work'
	'A virtual sports day'
	'Addaswyd y dulliau I ddefnyddio Teams/assignments o fewn Hwb yn hytrach na godos Gwaith o few Ffieliau'
	'Teachers…answering questions via chat in Team'
	'A Team was set up for every class'

| Using technology to support staff and parents | 'Zoom meetings as a whole school to clarify expectations' 'Zoom/Teams meetings for all school family to keep in touch and feel part of the school community' 'Devices on loan to all households' |

Challenges to teaching remotely: March 2020 - November 2020

3.19 This rapid change surfaced a number of challenges for schools and their clustered around the themes indicated in table 3.4

Table 3.4: Challenges faced by schools

Challenge	Examples
Access to Technology	'Rhaid cael cysylltiad we da' Angen mwy o galedwedd o fewn Ysgol' 'Limited internet' 'Problemau wi-fi ardal wledig' 'Ensuring deprived families have equipment to access online learning'
Learning and teaching	'Changing back to chalk and talk approach rather than engaging in a learning conversation has caused difficulties in making sessions as stimulating and ensuring pupils complete tasks' 'Unable to gauge how well learners have progressed'
Workload	'Being 'on-call' 'Additional feelings/Pressures of accountability'
Parents	'Lack of parental support' 'Difficult to plan for so many different family circumstances' 'Getting hard to reach families to engage' 'Parents understanding of how to use the learning platforms
Engagement	'Lack of engagement' 'Learners who did not want to engage/complete tasks would calsim there were issues with software' 'Continually chasing parents/pupils to promote engagement'

Professional learning and personal development in blended and distance learning

Prior to lockdown in March 2020

3.20   7 of the respondents had not received any professional learning in the use of technology supported learning prior to the first lockdown and reference was made to 'learning as we went along' and also 'trial and error'. Some of the respondents talked about in-house training and sharing expertise. There was some training in the use of Teams, Google Classroom. One school mentioned the opportunity to engage with online courses. Two schools felt that they were in a good position as they had experienced ICT staff in the school who provide in-house training. Two references were made to guidance available on HWB.

During the period March 2020-November 2020

3.21   Particularly during the initial period of the first lockdown, schools looked to inside their schools for advice and support. 17 of the 24 respondents felt that most of the advice and support was being sought from within the organisation. 11 of the respondents had used advice and support from their consortia. Other sources were HEI partners and Local authorities but the numbers were small. The respondents were asked about specific professional learning needs based on this experience. 13 wanted development in technology enhanced learning approaches, 12 wished to explore how blended learning could be incorporated into the curriculum and 6 were interested in creating learning communities. 17 said that the experience has made then think about how they will use technology in the future.

Lessons learned: March 2020 - November 2020

3.22   Respondents were asked to reflect on what was learned from their experience

Table 3.5: Key lessons from March 2020-November 2020

Theme	Examples
Developing independent learners	'More pupils training in school to be independent in accessing work online'
	'Pupils needed work that they could complete by themselves'
Engaging learners	'Pupils are more engaged when they can see their teacher's face'
	'Pupils do better in school'
	'Importance of effective feedback and interaction'
Flexible approaches to learning	'Importance of offering alternative to improve access inclusion'
	'Provide as many resources as possible for children and parents'
Technology	'Pupil's excelled using digital skills'
	'Access to devices was an issue'
Role of parents	'Better understanding of parental priorities'
	'Only those with supportive parents engage'
	'Difficult for some parents to manage home learning/working from home'
	' Not all parents had the time to be supportive'
	'Parents have enough information and support to support their children'
Health and Well-being	'Pupils missed contact with their friends and teachers'
	'Looking after pupils' and parents' well-being was a huge factor'
	'Not all Parents will push children to complete work- well-being and health was their concern'
	'Families appreciated the 'family focused' activities concentrating on outdoor learning and well-being'
	'Children adapt quickly'
	'Wellness and well-being'
Professional Learning	'Better technology skills than I thought'
	'Don't be scared to push boundaries'
	' I am much more resilient when learning a new skills'
	'How to use a broader range of software'
	'Out of adversity comes opportunity'
	'Staff need time to be upskilled'

What the implications for the development of new teachers?

3.23   Two of the research questions focus on what we can learn for Initial Teacher Education and the respondents were asked to reflect what we can learn from this experience for the development of new teachers. The following areas were identified: How to blend learning at home and school; Providing feedback remotely; Safeguarding and on-line learning; Confidence in different models of blended learning; Opportunity to work with different learning platforms; Engaging learners; Thinking creatively about how technology can support learning; Understand the needs of learner; Pedagogy led applications of technology.

Summary

Figure 3.5: Summary of initial survey findings

Is there a difference in schools understanding of blended learning?	• Different interpretation of terms • Range of approaches being employed • Interchangeable use of terms
What did different schools provide in terms of blended learning and distance learning during Covid-19?	• Initial analysis is showing a range of approaches linked to: knowledge and experience of teachers; access to technology; needs of learners
What were the experiences of lead partnership schools and partner schools of the transition to blended learning?	• Having to make pragmatic decisions in a short period of time • Explore ways to support all learners • A quick learning curve • Teacher workload • Language used to describe the experience to be analysed
What evidence of adapted good practice is available?	• Use of easily accessible apps to support learning • Communication with parents and pupils • Development of approaches over the time period

What are the challenges in providing blended learning?	• Professional learning needs • Teacher workload • Awareness of approaches that could be used • Access to technology • Access to resources • Differences between the sectors around issues such as safe-guarding • Parental support
How can HEIs prepare students to teach in a blended learning environment?	• Modules in innovative and creative pedagogy • Exploring ways of using technology in the classroom • Developing skills in collaborative approaches to learning • Opportunities for the action learning projects focusing on blended approaches
What evidence of adapted good practice is available?	• Innovative use of a range of apps • Engagement with parents • Consistent communication with parents and pupils • Development of interactive approaches
How do student teachers contribute to the work of their placements in schools in both face-to-face and online contexts?	• Engagement with action learning projects focused on blended and distance learning approaches • Sharing their learning on innovative uses of technology in and outside the classroom • Acting as consultants on technology enhanced learning

4.   Findings: Parental Voice

Introduction

4.1   Data on parental voice was collected from the case study schools across the three ITE partnerships involved in this project (Aberystwyth University, University of South Wales and Glyndwr University) via either a tailored parental survey or survey data provided by schools.

4.2   Parental responses included a wide range of age groups (with the majority of respondents between 30 and 60 years of age), respondents also included parents of pupils of all ages (both primary and secondary) and also included an even spread of respondents across gender categories.

4.3   All parental data has been collated in this section and the findings are presented below and arranged via themes. The themes identified and discussed in the following narrative can be found in table 9. This follows the same reporting pattern used with other data sets collected for this project.

Table 4.1: Themes from Parental Surveys

Number	Themes	Sub Theme
1	IT - Challenges	Connectivity
		Hardware
2	Provision for learners	Platforms used
		Communicating with Pupils/Parents
		Timetable
		Workspace
		Pupil Wellbeing
		Vulnerable pupils
3	Impact on Parents	Parent Workload
		Parent Confidence
4	Pupil engagement	Motivation
		Independent learning

IT challenges

4.4 Key issues with technology (identified by parents) included, but was not limited to, problems with connectivity (around half of parents referred to an ongoing issue with connectivity), platforms unable to cope, pressure on the connectivity within the home due to multiple members of the household needing to use the internet and lack of appropriate hardware.

Connectivity

4.5 Problems with connectivity was a major concern and issue for several parents. Although there was a particular issue in rural areas, problems were also apparent in urban areas. Some parents were not able to afford wifi access and relieved on trying to use mobile phones.

'Wifi strength here is poor at the best of times but was particularly bad during the first lockdown.' (Parent, A1)

'Poor internet in rural areas.' (Parent, A1)

'The Internet is very unstable.' (Parent, A4)

'We have major problems with the internet. Most days it does not work and when it occasionally does it is mind numbing slow.' (Parent, A1)

'Locally we are still on copper wire - not fibre, thus the connection can be weak and sporadic. The bandwidth is often narrow.' (Parent, A4)

4.6 In order to improve connectivity several parents also referred to the additional cost of upgrading their broadband connection which, although a viable option for some parents, created additional pressures on others.

'I upgraded my fibre due to 3 of us needed to use teams during the day.' (Parent, A4)

'The internet speeds are awful in our area so we are having to find the extra money to try and get fibre broadband.' (Parent, A1)

4.7   Several parents also noted that they experienced problems with the online platforms themselves and that platforms (due to increase use) weren't able to cope with the additional numbers,

> 'I think don't think Microsoft Teams can handle the amount of children on it.' (Parent, A4)

> 'everything kept on crashing' (Parent, A1)

> 'Sometimes he was unable to join a meeting, or he managed to join and then it went off. I did chase this up with the school's IT technician and it was the best it could be. Interruptions were must likely due to network/Teams overload at a given time.' (Parent, A1)

> 'He had trouble saving and submitting tasks and had to redo them which was very demoralising as he had worked hard to participate and do the work.' (Parent, A4)

4.8   An additional issue often reported by parents and also linked to connectivity is the issue of multiple household members requiring use of Internet at the same time and considerably affecting broadband speed, accessibility which often exacerbated parents frustrations.

> 'Due to parent working at home & sibling also home-schooling, internet couldn't cope with demand at times.' (Parent, A1)

> 'when it [the Internet] was [working], I required it for my work, so it created a lot of issues.'

> 'There are 6 people trying to use internet connection in our home and it just doesn't work at times.' (Parent, A1)

> 'I have got 3 kids that need to access online learning, I myself am a student who has live zoom lectures and then from time to time my husband is working from home. Internet is very poor and I live in a town! Something has to give' (Parent, A3)

Hardware

4.9 Another key issue across the board was access to appropriate hardware. With parents often referring to the need to borrow or purchase additional hardware and this was also a particular issue for those with several children in the same household. Some parents had bought keyboards for PlayStation so children could have some online access.

'Ryden ni wedi gorfod prynu gliniadur ail-law i'n plentyn. (Eitem ddrud annisgwyl)' (Parent, A1)

'We've had to purchase a second hand laptop for our child. (An expensive 'unexpected item).'

'We are fortunate to be in a position to offer both children a laptop, not all families can do that and that must put a terrible pressure on them. As both children should learn at the same time' (Parent, A1)

'We used the playstation with a keyboard!) (Parent, B2)

'We managed to borrow one laptop from school, it is difficult to sign one child out and the next in for one meeting after the other, plus get work done, as one needs a lot of help and support.' (Parent, A5)

'Borrowed a laptop from school. Won't connect to Internet, had to connect through ethernet which isn't very good.' (Parent, A4)

'we only have one computer, which I needed for my work.' (Parent, A1)

'I had to buy 4 laptops so they could complete the work.' (Parent, A1)

'1 laptop vs 2 children!' (Parent, A3)

4.10 Several also referred to their children attempting to access the content on a mobile as they didn't have access to appropriate hardware,

'Son had access to teams on mobile phone, but not ideal, also links wouldn't open.' (Parent, A1)

'Looking at a tiny screen (on a mobile phone) all day is not ideal.' (Parent, A1)

4.11   In addition, several parents also referred to issues with printing worksheets and having access to appropriate resources. In these cases may schools had delivered or posted materials to families.

'I had no printer facilities.' (Parent, A4)

'Was difficult to print off the work sheets as there was so many. One day there was almost 20' (Parent, A4)

'I am not very technical minded so find online learning hard.' (Parent, A4)

Learning provision/experience - Platforms used for online delivery

4.12   Parents referred to a variety of online platforms/programmes and resources that were used and provided by schools during the lockdown periods. These included platforms used for live online teaching i.e. Zoom and Teams; preparation of various types of recorded material; making use of online software i.e. Flipgrid, Just2Eeasy, SeeSaw; the use of e-mail and message platforms and even sending learning materials and activities by post. In one school, parents had been supported in the use of see saw before COVID-19 and were confident with the app.

4.13   In line with the reference above, parents also noted that schools made use of a variety of communication methods to support pupils during the period that online teaching was taking place. Communication methods included e-mails, message platforms (Class Dojo, Show My Homework, Parentmail) phone calls as well as online guidance for parents.

Communicating with pupils/parents

4.14   How often schools communicated with pupils at home varied with some schools seemingly in regular contact with the home 'we could ring school at any point and teachers rang twice a week' whilst other parents indicated that they didn't receive any contact from schools during the initial lockdown period 'No communication concerning my child whatsoever, just rubbish

about Urdd etc.' Some parents said they were encouraged to join in with their child's well-being call and felt that the school cared as much about their welfare as the child.

4.15   A few parents noted that the level of communication and provision for learners during at the beginning of the initial lockdown was minimal but that this did improve over the course of the lockdown,

'…nothing on computer till a lot later, then system changed 3 times, difficult to understand what was expected of your child at this point. No access to Hwb, took 7 weeks to get pupils set up.' (Parent, A3)

'The school has used several digital platforms and web sites to deliver work. Sometimes it has been difficult to work out where to find things or where to submit written work.' (Parent, A3)

'One pack given during very early lockdown...Very poor during lockdown.' (Parent, A3)

'In the initial lockdown the work provided was generic work with me as a parent having to decide which level of work my child had to complete. E.g. work provided via twinkle.' (Parent, A4)

'packs were regularly provided to my house and hand delivered by the class teacher' (Parent, B1)

'Range of activities provided but not clear how much was expected.' (Parent, A3)

4.16   In addition, several parents from English medium homes (whose pupils attended Welsh medium education) indicated that further support in English would have been beneficial and would have enabled them to further support their child when learning from home. This is also in-line with other findings (see project 3 for a more detailed analysis of parental views on this aspect).

'For the work provided in Welsh, there was no English translation for myself to be able to support my child to understand the task fully. I had to

rely on google translate, which was not effective, with my child answering questions incorrectly due to poor translation.' (Parent, A4)

'Some task instructions provided only in Welsh, difficult for English speaking parents!' (Parent, A5)

'My daughter was on the Welsh side so I struggled to help her with work as I don't speak Welsh.' (Parent, A1)

4.17   However, most respondents also acknowledged that schools had adapted quickly and were satisfied with the support provided overall, especially as time progressed as they thought it had *very much improved*.

'I can't support the school enough they was very supportive to us all as a family' (Parent, A4)

'We received 1-2 phone calls from school but could have contacted them by email or phone if we have any issues' (Parent, A5)

'Teimlaf fod yr ysgol a'r athrawon wedi gwneud eu gorau i ddarparu gwaith i fy mhlant ar amser ble roedd pawb yn dygymod â dysgu sgiliau newydd.' (Parent, A4)

'I feel that the school and the teachers have done their best to provide work for my children at a time where everyone was getting to grips with learning new skills.'

'Work was always clearly explained with a video and written explanation. A range of hands on/practical activities and written ones.' (Parent, A5)

'We could not have managed without the help of the school – work for the children, food parcels when things were difficult'

4.18   Most parents also agreed that the range of tasks and activities was appropriate and clear but that further guidance was required on occasion

'Ambell dasg gyda chyfarwyddiadau sydd ddim yn glir' (Parent, A4)

'A few tasks where the guidance wasn't always clear.'

4.19   There was also some reference to the general lack of feedback provided during this initial stage No work was to be handed in for marking or feedback.

Timetable

4.20   When the initial lockdown came into force parents referred to the need to impose some kind of structure within the home. In order to keep an orderly routine at home, several parents structured the online learning around the school day,

'they did the lessons as per normal timetable' (Parent, A4)

'Both children were on live sessions between 9 - 3.30' (Parent, A4)

'was present in all lessons and we stuck to the timetable as if they were in school.' (Parent, A3)

4.21   Several other parents referred to the creation of their own timetable that suited their own needs,

'We had a flexible approach fitting school work around family life with having an infant at home and depending on how my child was feeling.' (Parent, A4)

'Both worked in the morning, but at different times.' (Parent, A1)

'She had a lesson every morning at the same time then we would try and do 2 pieces of work a day as set by the teacher.' (Parent, A5)

'Maintained school routine for morning - gave up after lunch as not enough work for them to do.' (Parent, A3)

'One child in the morning the other in the afternoon.' (Parent, A4)

'First lock down after expecting work from the school we set up work areas for them and expected them to be working for school hours but when nothing canes from the school we set tasks for them as best we could but it became more about trying to stop them playing.' (Parent, A4)

'After an informal start - and some outdoor projects - I set a timetable for them - similar but not identical to school. Slightly later start - slightly longer break - giving time to water plants and have a bit of exercise - rest of morning session - after lunch was time to complete preferred subjects - with younger child finishing earlier.' (Parent, A1)

'We took breaks and did it as well as we could' (Parent, A1)

Workspace in the home

4.22   Several parents recognised the need for allocate a specific workspace when learning/working from home as everyone required *Space to work*

'Both had a desk, and each had a laptop' (Parent, A3)

'Children in separate rooms to reduce distractions' (Parent, A3)

4.23   However, many also referred to the need to acquisition / designate different locations around the house (specifically the kitchen table) as a workstation and a communal space was also key in some cases as this also enabled them to monitor their children's activities,

'They each sat at the kitchen table at different times so they had space to work.' (Parent, A4)

'Worked in a communal area so I could keep an eye as she can get distracted and help was on hand. Plenty of space for work.' (Parent, A1)

'Fe wnaeth hi weithio mewn gwahanol lefydd yn y tŷ - roedd yn symud os oedd hi'n cael llond bol mewn lleoliad e.e. symud o fwrdd y gegin a rhoi bwrdd bach yn ffenest yr ystafell fyw.' (Parent, A1)

'She worked in different places in the house - she moved if she got fed up in a location e.g. move from the kitchen table and place a small table in the living room window.'

'We'd work at the kitchen table so she knew it was school work time. Setting that routine helped to a degree.' (Parent, A4)

4.24 However, a few parents also acknowledged that finding an appropriate work space within the home was difficult at times,

> 'A lot of challenges to find a quiet space' (Parent, A4)

> 'Space very limited' (Parent, A4)

> 'My daughter worked on my laptop in my workspace.' (Parent, A4)

> 'I am a teacher and a parent and there is only so much multi-tasking you can do and it was difficult to find a space to do my own teaching' (Parent, B2)

Wellbeing

4.25 As indicated in the other data sets, wellbeing was also on the forefront of parents minds and they tried to ensure their children were also supported in this and often wellbeing took over from the need to complete academic tasks.

> 'No one to oversee though and I'm not willing to enforce anything either as I do not want to jeopardise his mental health and well-being.' (Parent, A4)

> 'It was very difficult as he was missing his school friends and his normal routine.' (Parent, A2)

> 'Mae angen cofio mai plant yw'r rhain a dychmygu sut bydden ni (oedolion) wedi hoffi gwneud beth mae'r plant yn gorfod ei wneud rŵan). Plant a phobl ifanc ydyn nhw wedi'r cwbl - nid oedolion bach! Iechyd a lles yw popeth.' (Parent, A1)

> 'We need to remember that these are children and imagine how we (adults) would have liked to do what the children have to do now). They are children and young people after all - not small adults! Health and wellbeing is everything.'

Vulnerable pupils

4.26   A few parents also referred to the need to support those with additional learning needs and several parents found this extremely challenging during lockdown,

> 'Because of his special needs it was difficult to get him focused.' (Parent, A4)

> 'son who normally has 1 to 1 majority of work requires adult present to complete work written for him. Not ideal as 1 to 1 normally' (Parent, A3)

> 'It was sometimes difficult to support my dyslexic son with all subjects set. As I would have to learn aspects of the work first in order to help him (along with working fulltime).' (Parent, A4)

> 'My eldest has ADHD which can make it harder for him to focus on trying to work.' (Parent, A4)

> 'my son has a range of interventions from a range of specialists (speech language, physio, hearing impaired etc) I don't have the experience to deliver this.' (Parent, A4)

> 'I am scared to send my child to school but I can't provide what is needed home – he needs the specialist support being in school provides'

4.27   'Further focus on the experience of learners and disadvantaged learners during the pandemic can be found in research project 2 and project 7.

Impact on parents

4.28   Parents took on the role of full time teachers as well as carers during the lockdown periods and this posed several challenges and put additional pressure on parents to complete the online tasks provided for their children,

> 'I am a front line worker and not able to sit with my 14 year old during school hours.' (Parent, A4)

> 'I found it hard with my learning difficulties.' (Parent, A1)

'All tasks required parental Guidance, I would have to go through the work before my children could start. I was the teacher of you like.' (Parent, A3)

'I had my partners son at the time also and one who had just started college, I couldn't manage all the work the school had sent so I ran my own timetable, using the school work as a base and dud the parts I could do with all of them.' (Parent, A3)

'I struggled immensely with having different work to do with each... It got to the point where we had to just stop doing it.' (Parent, A1)

Parental workload/support

4.29   A string and consistent message received via the parental data was that teaching their child at home was often challenging and in some cases caused additional anxiety,

'Very stressful' / 'We didn't manage :(' (Parent, A1)

'The main challenges were being able (as parents) to work from home while managing his learning.' (Parent, A5)

'I work full time so juggling mine and their work was a struggle and at times.' (Parent, A3)

'I need support as much as my child and have the support of adults' (Parent, B1)

4.30   In particular, several parents were overwhelmed and found it extremely difficult to manage their own work as well as support their children's online learning,

'both needed to be online throughout the day and needed support to talk through their tasks in order to ensure they achieved as much as possible.' (Parent, A1)

'The biggest challenge was helping 4 kids asking for help at same time if they didn't understand something' (Parent, A4)

'[support] varied depending on what needed doing outside on the farm' (Parent, A4)

'Children all working at different levels at the same table was almost impossible' (Parent, A3)

'I would like to be supervising learning more but do not have capacity.' (Parent, A3)

'Both parents had to work so learning was sporadic and haphazard at best.' (Parent, A2)

'Difficult with two babies affecting his concentration and my ability to give him all the attention he required' (Parent, A5)

Level of parental confidence in supporting learning

4.31   In addition varying levels of confidence were reported by parents when considering their ability to effectively support their children's learning in the home environment.

'I'm not good at teaching ... I also found it very stressful.' (Parent, A4)

'I'm not a teacher / Not sure if teaching it right.' (Parent, A2)

'Dydw i ddim yn teimlo fy mod i yn deall digon i helpu dim athrawes ydw i' (Parent, A4)

'I don't feel I understand enough to help, I am not a teacher.'

'I felt confident but again home isn't the place to be doing lessons.'

'Ddim yn gwybod sut y ddylsen i ddysgu'r gwaith iddo, pa lefel oedd e arno, faint dylsen i ei bwsho, beth oedd disgwyliadau'r ysgol' (Parent, A4)

'Didn't know how I should teach him, what level he was at, how much I should push, what were the expectations of the school.'

'I didn't feel confident with explaining the work task.' (Parent, A4)

'We can support but we are not teachers and as our youngest is 4 and requires the most support often the others miss out.' (Parent, A3)

'Not knowing the curriculum or the subjects they were working on made it difficult for me to support them.' (Parent, A1)

'Some tasks were manageable others were more challenging.' (Parent, A4)

'I've not been to university to learn how to teach children, and whilst she is my daughter we have different ways of learning things. And I'm super impatient, which doesn't help when my daughter's having a bit of a meltdown because she can't understand the work and mam can't explain.' (Parent, A4)

'It was stressful and a lot of the subjects I would have to Google to understand before I could then actually help.' (Parent, A4)

4.32   Confidence also seemed to be linked to parental profession and those with some experience of teaching or sufficient time were often more confident in providing the support required.

'my wife and I are educated to degree level and hold professional qualifications' (Parent, A1)

'I'm confident with the schools help I can provide education to a decent standard.' (Parent, A2)

'I was also teaching from home during this time and have a thorough understanding of a couple of subjects - though a lot less of others! Felt more comfortable supporting high school child than primary one as that is where my experience lies.' (Parent, A1)

'I have a lot of time to help as I am a stay at home mum.' (Parent, A4)

4.33   In line with the previous remarks on guidance only being offered in Welsh by a few Welsh medium schools even to those from EMH several parents felt that their lack of language ability (in Welsh) impacted their ability to effectively support their children.,

'Some subjects I felt very confident in but my Welsh is rusty so I found myself having to double check a lot.' (Parent, A4)

'It would be very confident if not for Welsh language issues (we speak English at home).' (Parent, A5)

'Confident with supporting learning in English but I cannot help with Welsh and feel he will suffer in this area.' (Parent, A5)

'children both working in Welsh and I teach in English.' (Parent, A1)

'Understood some but as in Welsh found it difficult to follow so couldn't help much.' (Parent, A1)

'I didn't understand the Welsh parts' (Parent, A1)

'Things are so different these days and techniques are different. My children learn through the medium of welsh . They are fluent welsh speakers . I have limited understanding but have some basic knowledge.' (Parent, A1)

4.34   Another concern highlighted by parents was their lack of subject specific knowledge,

'Yr 7 and 8 stuff is fine but gcse maths, physics, welsh bacc and chemistry are really hard to get your head around' (Parent, A3)

'I haven't been involved. What she is working on is way above my level of education!' (Parent, A4)

'Ar y cyfan yn hyderus ond ddim wastad gyda'r arbenigedd i fedru ei helpu. Fel rhieni ryden ni'n trio mor galed ac y gallwn ni i gefnogi ein plant. Dwi'n aml yn meddwl am y plant lle does ddim cefnogaeth adre a mor anodd mae o iddyn nhw.' (Parent, A1)

'Overall confident but not always with the expertise to be able to help.
As parents we try as hard as we can to support our children.
I often think of the
children where there is no support at home and how difficult it is for them.'

'Some subjects I know more about than others! And as she approaches GCSE I expect that I will not have adequate knowledge, but I know how to look things up and find resources.' (Parent, A4)

4.35 Linked to the above is the recognition that teaching strategies and pedagogical approaches have changed since they were in school,

'They do things differently now.' (Parent, A4)

'The education today is very different to what it was and found it hard to explain information to the children' (Parent, A1)

'Children are taught differently than how I was taught.' (Parent, A4)

4.36 Parents also referred to increasing amount of frustration as they felt that their children were not responding to them in the same way they would to teachers in the school,

'But she doesn't listen to me like she listens to the teachers.' (Parent, A4)

'It was not relevant, I was not permitted to help.' (Parent, A1)

'I could help when needed, but my daughter won't really listen to my advice. She says she has been taught other ways, and I don't know what I'm doing!' (Parent, A4)

'My son said this is not a school, I'm not the teacher and he will not learn. So I have to push him hard to do anything.' (Parent, A4)

Pupil engagement/motivation

4.37 Linked to the previous theme parents also referred to difficulties in motivating their children to effectively engage with online learning,

'it was extremely hard to get them to concentrate.' (Parent, A1)

'Hard to keep them focused' (Parent, A1)

'She has no motivation to do it.' (Parent, A4)

'Found it hard to get my son to log in at times he refused' (Parent, A4)

'It was hard to get back into it. My youngest struggled with confidence.' (Parent, A1)

'I had the time for them but they were just completely uninterested. Any work they did do was all rushed just to get it done. Basically nothing really sank in.' (Parent, A1)

4.38 However, a few parents also acknowledged that their children didn't require parental encouragement and tended to complete work themselves,

'Roedd fy mhlentyn yn wych am hunan-ddisgyblu.' (Parent, A1)

'My child was great at self-disciplining'

'He had to do it alone. We are working' (Parent, A4)

'She's very independent ... just got on with it' (Parent, A4)

'I left her to her own devices.' (Parent, A4)

Pupil voice

What were your experiences blended learning across different periods of lockdown?

4.39 Pupils reported challenges of having access to laptops and submitting work online. In addition struggles with completing practical work at home was also reported by secondary pupils.

'I managed to do most written work but struggled with practical work' all through. mid wales, (bilingual yr13)

4.40 Primary school pupils spoke about having to take photographs of their work and sending it to their teacher.

What are the challenges or benefits of blended learning?

4.41   When asked about the challenges of blended learning during lockdown, pupils reported that working alone and concentrating was difficult. One pupil commented on the move from the hub to home learning.

> 'There was a few days that I wasn't in hub school and to do my learning at home was very difficult because there was no teacher available to help me, which there is in hub school and i get my learning done much quicker in the hub school. ' (Mid Wales Yr 6)

4.42   Access to shared technology was also a challenge and parents working from home using the technology meant that some pupils had to their school work at the weekend in order to have access to devices.

> 'We had to do it all at the weekend because mummy and daddy had to do their work.' (EM Primary and Mid Wales Yr 1)

4.43   Despite the challenges pupils also talked about having choice in what they were learning and being able to work at their own pace was a benefit of blended learning.

Summary

4.44   The data shows that parents and pupils had a range of different experiences. However, despite the challenges presented during the COVID-19 pandemic, parents acknowledged that schools adapted quickly to the changing circumstances and that overall they were satisfied with the support provided by schools. A summary of the key findings from the parental and pupil voice is outlined below;

- The data shows that IT challenges, sufficient hardware and connectivity were a key concern during the different phases of lockdown. This was commented on by both parents and pupils.
- Communication with pupils and parents varied across the data set with some schools in regular contact with the home and others indicating that during the first lockdown there was no contact from schools.

However, there were indications that the level of communication improved over the course of the initial lockdown and into the second lockdown.

- Some schools implemented their own surveys to capture the parental experience to inform their practice and guage the support required.

- Parents in English medium homes indicated that further support in English would have helped them to support their children at home more effectively.

- Parents reported challenges in supporting children with additional learning needs and balancing becoming full-time teachers with caring responsibilities and work responsibilities. Becoming anxious and overwhelmed was reported frequently. In addition parents also commented on varying levels of confidence in relation to supporting their children effectively with their learning in the home environment.

- Parents referred to the challenges associated with motivating their children effectively to engage in online/distance learning. Pupils also reported that working alone and concentrating on their learning was difficult.

- Pupils did however, report that having a choice in what they were learning and working at their own pace was a benefit of blended learning.

5. Findings: Senior Leader Voice

Introduction

5.1 Several interviews (N=14) were held with Senior Leaders from selected schools within the three HEI establishments that are co-authors on this report (Aberystwyth University, University of South Wales and Glyndwr University). To protect the individuals and establishments identity each school has been allocated a code (please see the table below).

Table 5.1: Senior Leader sample

	School Code	Type of School	Date of Interview	Language of Instruction
1	A1	All through	Dec 20	Bilingual
2	A2	Primary	Dec 20	English
3	A3	Secondary	Dec 20	Bilingual (Mostly English)
4	A4	All through	Jan 21	Bilingual
5	A5	Primary	Jan 21	Welsh
6	B1	Primary	Mar 21	English
7	B2	Primary	April 21	English
8	B3	Primary	April 21	English
9	B4	Primary	April 21	English
11	C1	Primary	February 2020	English
12	C2	Primary	February 2020	English
13	C3	Primary	February 2020	English
14	C4	Primary	March 2020	English
15	C5	Primary	March 2020	English

5.2   Each interview was subsequently transcribed and a thematic analysis of the key and sub themes was undertaken. A narrative of the themes identified and accompanying qualitative data taken from the interviews can be seen below and a summary of the themes can be seen in table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Themes from Senior Leader Interviews

	Themes	**Sub Theme**
1	Adapting	Adapting to distance learning and blended learning
2	Choice of online platforms	
3	IT Support	Training and professional learning
		Hardware
		Connectivity
4	Workload	
5	Staff wellbeing	
6	Provision for learners	Initial lockdown
		Developing provision
		Pedagogy and practice
7	Supporting learners	Access to technology
		Vulnerable students
8	Pupil engagement online	
9	Pupil wellbeing	
11	Support at home	Support from parents
		Support for parents
12	Return to teaching after initial national lockdown and entering the second national lockdown	
13	Reflecting on good practice	

Adapting - Adapting to distance learning and blended learning

5.3   A constant theme through the period March 2020-February 2021 is one of adapting to different types of delivery. There were periods of distance learning and also periods of blended learning where learners were not always in school or had then face-to-face teaching interrupted by local lockdowns and quarantines. The first lockdown saw a rapid shift to distance learning. One contributor noted that a move to distance teaching had come as a 'shock' to many.

> 'Doedd neb wedi clywed am y gair 'Teams' na dysgu o bell tan yr wythnos 'ny.
>
> 'Nobody had heard of the word' Teams 'or distance learning until that week.' (SLI, A5)

5.4   There was also a general consensus that the change to online learning (although expected to some extent) happened abruptly, with little notice and with limited time to allow schools to prepare new online provision. The sense of urgency is highlighted in the following quotations:

> 'An emergency staff meeting allowed us to give initial training...' (SL1, A1)
>
> 'The challenge of having to do it rather than explore it!' (SL1, C1)

5.5   The sample showed that schools were at very different stages of being able to move to distance and blended learning, prior to the lockdown, some schools foundations were not sufficiently robust in terms of using software for distance teaching but others had more expertise and experience of technology-enhanced learning.

> 'Araf deg... Roedden ni, os dwi'n onest, tu ôl i le dylen ni wedi bod o ran dysgu o bell ac o ran dysgu annibynnol ar lein, a phethau fel na… Pan ddechreuon ni roedden ni dal ... ddim ar HWB ... doedd e ddim yn rhan o'n dysgu.'

'To be honest we were slow, behind where we should have been with distance learning and independent learning on-line, and those sort of things. When we started we were still… not using HWB…it was not part of our teaching' (SLI, A3)

5.6 One school reported that they initially thought that the school would be closed for the two weeks before Easter followed by the Easter holiday. They had been listening to the news and following what was happening in other parts of the world. Given the uncertainty at that time, the school didn't consider the use of technology to support home learning, but noted that they felt well-prepared before the first lockdown. In addition the school reported that the messages about school closure, partial closure and the continuation after the Easter break was very confusing.

'And as a senior leadership team, we used that first week in March to prepare packs for the children with two weeks' worth of learning in. So we did paper packs, we bought resources and so we made sure that they had pencils, paper, books and enough activities to last them for two whole weeks. So we printed everything up. We've got the three hundred seventy nine children at school and so we got three hundred and seventy nine packs done.' (SLI, B3)

5.7 As well as adapting to distance provision, a number of schools had to quickly move to a blended delivery too as they became 'hub' schools and had to offer both distance and face-to-face delivery. Schools interpreted blended learning in a range of ways due to their experience levels and the needs of their learners.

'Blended learning is a mix of approaches to support learning and not just online learning' (SLI, C1)

Adapting - Choice of online platforms

5.8 Following the initial change, schools also referred to the need to choose an appropriate distance learning platform(s) to use during lockdown. Schools in

the sample were at different stages in their use of technology and familiarity with platforms and applications that could be used in this situation. Ultimately, some schools chose a platform that seemed to meet their own individual schools' needs:

> 'Y peth cyntaf oedd edrych i weld beth oedd mas na, a sut oni am ddechrau'r daith yma ar ddysgu o bell a dysgu cyfunol. Wnaethon ni trafod a nifer o ysgolion...am le allen ni fynd, ac roedd e'n edrych fel rhyw fath o 'mixed economy' oedd beth allen ni neud, gyda chymysgedd o Teams a Moodle. Doedd na ddim lot o gefnogaeth at Moodle o'r awdurdod, ond i ni mi oedd Moodle yn edrych fel rhywbeth allwn ni datblygu, a rhywbeth sy'n gallu tyfu gyda ni, a rhywbeth allwn ni defnyddio i greu rhywbeth arbennig.'

> 'The first thing was to look at what was out there, and how not to start this distance learning and blended learning journey. We talked to a number of schools ... about where we could go, and it looked like some kind of 'mixed economy' was what we could do, with a mix of Teams and Moodle. There was not a lot of support for Moodle from the authority, but for us Moodle looked like something we can develop, something that can grow with us, and something we can use to create something special.' (SLI, A3)

5.9   Several schools also referred to a trialling phase, which included discussion on the development of current platforms used or adopting a new platform across the school,

> '…beth oedd y gorau i ddefnyddio? Ife parhau gyda Show My Homework neu symud i Microsoft Teams neu fynd i ddefnyddio Google Classroom? A fuon ni'n treiali ymysg ein gilydd, yn gosod aseiniadau, ac yn y blaen, ac mi ddaethon ni i'r canlyniad bod ni'n mynd i fynd gyda Teams er mwyn, mewn ysgol 3 i 19, fod gyda ni fodd i feithrin cysondeb ar draws yr ysgol.'

'… what was the best to use? Do we continue with Show My Homework or move to Microsoft Teams or go to use Google Classroom? We trialled (platforms) amongst ourselves other, set assignments, and so on, and we came to the conclusion that we were going to go with Teams so that, in a 3 to 19 school, we could have foster consistency throughout the school.' (SL1, A4)

5.10 This process can also be seen in the response provided from an interview from a different school,

'We all did some online training... We looked at both systems [Google Classroom and Teams], and we all reached the conclusion that Google Classroom was a bit more of a straightforward tool to use with children, rather than Teams. That is why we went for it. ' (SLI, A2)

5.11 The initial need to adopt a platform quickly was a key finding as schools recognised that adopting an online platform was essential to ensure effective communication with learners,

'Heb y dechnoleg yma dwi ddim yn gwybod sut fydden ni wedi cyrraedd teuluoedd a throsglwyddo gwaith heb system fel Teams...'

'Without this technology I don't know how we would have reached families and transferred work without a system like Teams ...' (SLI, A4)

5.12 One school initially built a website to ensure that learners and parents had easy access to resources and a 'one-stop shop',

'The website was planned and built with access to resources. There were choice grids covering the areas of learning and a free learning choice based on topic. Topics were set by year groups and changed each week. [in the early stages] there were no expectations of live learning or videos.' (SLI, C3)

5.13 However, some schools, when interviewed, spoke about a really smooth transition to online learning as a result of priorities already ,developed around their work on formative assessment prior to the pandemic. The use

of See-saw prior to lockdown was commented on by a number of primary schools.

> 'And as part of that, we've been looking at feedback and using blended learning and using See-Saw, which we've had in place for probably about a year. And that was growing. And the use of it in terms of the pupils knowledge of it, the way it was used in the classroom or as part of classroom practise, that was kind of embedded.' (SLI, B2)

> 'We have used Seesaw for a long time to help communicate with parents so utilised this due to familiarity and parental access at home.' (SLI, C3)

5.14   One interviewee noted that the choice of online platform was closely related to the support available from the local authority and that adopting a specific online platform was in-line with what the local authority was promoting,

> 'fod e'n ffitio mewn gyda beth oedd y Sir yn neud...'

> '...it fitted in with what the County was doing...' (SLI, A4)

5.15   As indicated above, the experience of some interviews of support provided by the local authority was positive. However, another interview from a different school (and different local authority) noted that the local authority hindered their technological capabilities. In relation to the adoption of HWB, he noted that the step should have been taken 'five, six years ago' and not at short notice at the outset of a global pandemic..

> 'Roedd mynd ar HWB yn beth mawr. Roedd bod yn rhan o gyfundrefn genedlaethol o ran y ffordd yr ydych chi'n cyfathrebu plant... Rwyt ti'n teimlo, gyda'r rhwydwaith yna - un Gymru gyfan - y tu ôl i chi, fod fwy o hyder gyda chi yn yr hyn yr ydych yn neud.'

> 'Going on HWB was a big thing. Being part of a national system in terms of the way you communicate with children ... You feel that with that network - the whole of Wales - behind you, you have more confidence in you what you are doing.' (SLI, A3)

IT support – Professional learning

5.16   The move to distance learning, and the use of a wide variety of platforms to offer the provision, required significant support and professional learning to prepare and 'upskill' teachers. Professional learning development was identified in pedagogies of technology enhanced learning, technology skills, making technology choices and models of blended and distance learning.

5.17   Two contributors noted that only a very small minority of their staff cited any type of distance teaching expertise prior to the lockdown. As a result, during the week leading up to the initial lockdown period they had to continue with an element on educating their learners, while also developing skills, and transferring some training on Teams:

> '…roedden ni'n padlo fel elyrch ar y dŵr gyda'r traed bach yn mynd, a ninnau'n trio gweithio'n socs off i ddeall Teams...'

> '…we were paddling like swans on the water with our little feet going, and we were trying to work our socks off to understand Teams ...' (SLI, A5)

5.18   A few schools referenced their previous experience with E-sgol. However, once again, although only a small number of staff members were part of this network wide program they proved invaluable in teaching, and assisting staff with the move to use software such as Teams for distance teaching on live streaming. One contributor estimated that about 60% of his school's staff benefited from the training provided by his E-sgol teachers.

5.19   There were also additional benefits from this engagement with E-sgol, particularly in relation to managing the institutions' response when formulating distance learning implementation policies,

> '…mae di roi lot o hyder i'n staff ni i wybod beth ma nhw'n neud, a sut ma nhw'n gallu cadw saff. Ni wedi seilio protocols ni ar protocols E-sgol, sy wedi helpu ni i ddysgu ac i wybod fod ni ddim yn dechrau o'r

dechrau, ond yn hytrach ni'n dechrau o safbwynt pobol sydd â llawer
mwy o wybodaeth na ni.'

'…it has given our staff a lot of confidence to know what they are doing,
and how they can keep safe. We based our protocols on E-sgol
protocols, which helped us to learn and know that we are not starting
from the beginning, but rather from the perspective of people who have
much more knowledge than us.' (SLI, A3)

5.20   As the use of E-sgol was highlighted above, the use of a departmental
technological 'champions' model within a single institution in order to lead
and sustain technological innovation within their fields, and to assist their
fellow departmental teachers was also a key finding.

5.21   In some cases, it was noted that the assistance from the local authorities
was relatively slow to arrive. One contributor mentioned: 'we started the path'
before that help appeared. In addition, no support in the use of Moodle
appeared from the direction of the local authority. The local authority
favoured Google Classroom, and limited their support to that software. The
school, however, saw the benefits of Moodle, as offering something
'fantastic' to the school in the long run, rather than a short term solution as
Google Classroom appeared. Fortunately for the school they were given
specific support from alternative sources. The contributor mentioned how
'good relationships and strong relationships' were already established with
other schools that had experience of leading on the use of Moodle. This
proved to be a notable aid, and enabled staff to receive and apportion
expertise.

5.22   Another contributor noted that their local consortia had;

'…produced lots of documents on their website. But I've got to be
honest because we were up and running and happy with our system
and the parents seemed to be happy with it, we wanted to do
something that was very simple.' (SLI, B1)

5.23   One school observed how support from their consortia had developed and adapted through the period March 2020-February 2021 and this has been confirmed by an interview with Consortia. Initially it was signposting to resources but developed into bitesize professional learning to support and develop approaches.

5.24   However, in the experience of those contributors from other localities, there was a sense that the County's local authorities had also been extremely supportive.

> 'Mae'n amhrisiadwy! O ran y dysgu o bell. O ran strwythur dyddiol yr ysgol. O ran y rheolau. Mae pob adran wedi cyd-dynnu i helpu. Oni bai amdanyn nhw dwi'n siŵr fyddai lot ohonon ni ar goll. Ma nhw wedi bod yn anhygoel.'

> 'It's priceless! In terms of distance learning. In terms of the daily structure of the school. In terms of the rules. All departments have pulled together to help. If it wasn't for them I'm sure many of us would be lost. They've been amazing.' (SL1, A5)

5.25   One local authority's focus was on promoting the use of Teams and this enabled schools to access the specialist support of individuals within the local education authority, and the various, and constructive, sessions they offered on Teams use - from initial, general support, to help on the advanced use of the software. In addition, they provided additional training, as well as allocating resources and responding to any technological difficulties or problems that arose. It was also possible, as one contributor highlighted, to request tailored support from the County address, and selective software-specific assistance. On this basis specific school, or departmental courses could be drawn up. He represented, according to the evidence, 'extremely good' tailored support.

5.26   When considering support from the consortia one contributor noted that there wasn't 'that much' support at the beginning but support sessions were offered in due course.

5.27   In reference to training on online safety, one contributor, noted that only limited child safety training was organised as a whole school beyond local authority provision. There were some departments, and individual teachers where independent training was arranged, but that was based on their specific areas os study, or a particular desire to master a particular technology. In addition, another contributor noted that the only additional training sought beyond the County's provision was some training on Minecraft.

5.28   One contributor also noted that the skills learned and developed by staff should continue to be used after the lockdown comes to an end:

> 'Dwi'n cofio dweud yn ystod y cyfnod clo cyntaf, popeth rydyn ni'n dysgu nawr, mae'n rhaid i ni beidio â gadael y rhain i fynd. Mi oedd yn rhaid i ni gadw defnyddio'r sgiliau Flip Grid, a Screen Cast, Adobe Spark, ac yn y blaen - ein bod ni'n cadw nhw, ac yn defnyddio nhw. A sicrhau fod y plant yn gyfarwydd â nhw.'

> 'I remember saying during the first lock, everything we learn now, we must not let these go. We had to keep using the skills of Flip Grid, and Screen Cast, Adobe Spark, and so on - that we kept them, and used them. And make sure the children are familiar with them.' (SLI, A5)

5.29   Another school noted that, after the first lockdown, an attempt was made to carry out a survey after returning to school in September on the type of training or support teachers wanted. In addition, a system was sought whereby each member had the last free session free within a two-week period of learning. They hoped this would enable staff to work from home and / or attend a professional training during that time. Following this, an attempt was made to amend the learning schedules to ensure that staff had an extra hour for that training in the future.

> 'Rydyn ni wedi dechrau symud ar bethau nawr, a dydyn ni ddim eisiau i ni arafu ar bethau gan fod pethau'n symud. Eto, mae'n bwysig buddsoddi yn hwnna.'

'We've started moving on now, and we don't want to slow things down because things are moving. Again, it's important to invest in that.' (SLI, A3)

5.30   Most teachers noted that the main training and encouragement was offered during the summer term. However, one contributor noted that INSET training days were now increasingly focused on raising awareness of technical skills. A number of schools mentioned the extent of in-house development opportunities in their school, 'staff were supported with an in-house programme to develop skills (SLI, C1). It is important to note how schools engaged with in-house support to develop their skills.

IT support – Hardware

5.31   Access to appropriate hardware was a challenge for both schools and learners as they developed their approaches to distance and blended learning. The changing requirements are reflected in this theme.

5.32   In one school, it was noted in an initial survey, that the technological provision amongst their staff was deemed acceptable on the whole. Some noted, that because they did not have access to the 'most reliable' equipment, they were obliged to acquire new equipment, but not generally. However, the provision was reassessed in due course. As the lockdown period developed, and the educational provision changed, it was decided that laptops were needed to provide learners with the best opportunities. The 'frustration' at some staff's inability to perform some form of distance teaching triggered the move to ensure they all had effective hardware,

'Limited and dated devices to deliver teaching' (SLI, C3)

5.33   However, a different school decided that there was a need to provide its staff with laptops from the onset in order to secure a level playing field for all. Therefore, there was investment in laptops for staff and this released staff computers, previously available in each class, to be offered to learners in the

computer rooms. According to the contributor, these laptops were essential as indicated from the responses below:

> 'Newid y gêm yn llwyr'

> 'Completely changed the game'

> 'Os nag yw'r teclynnau iawn gyda chi yna sdim pwynt'

> 'If you don't have the right equipment then there's no point'

> Rydych chi yn gallu gofyn i unigolion defnyddio peiriannau eu hunain, ond mae'n anodd iawn cael unrhyw fath o gysondeb wedyn, a ti ddim yn ysbrydoli hyder yn y staff fod yr ysgol eisiau cefnogi nhw...ac yn gwneud e'n hawdd.

> 'You can ask individuals to use their own machines, but it's very difficult to get any kind of consistency afterwards, and you don't inspire confidence in staff that the school wants to support them ... and is making it easy.' (SLI, A3)

5.34   However, the process of acquiring laptops for staff was made more difficult by the shortage of laptops worldwide. Therefore, despite taking action to purchase the laptops immediately as the initial lockdown was announced, the laptops were slow to arrive, contributing to and affecting the speed of the move to distance learning. Some schools did use the WG scheme to support those who needed it. There are also examples of adapting gaming technology by adding keyboards to allow students to engage with online learning.

5.35   Another interviewee also highlighted the significance of additional materials for staff when moving to distance teaching. Access to relevant headsets, mice, and cables was also identified as being essential for ensuring the effectiveness of distance learning.

IT support - Connectivity

5.36   One consistent and key areas of technical difficulties for staff was connectivity and access to a reliable internet connection. Several contributors noted that this posed an enormous problem for a several members of staff throughout the lockdown,

> 'O ran y ddaearyddiaeth, a le ydyn ni, mae e'n hunllef i rai staff. A ma rhai yn byw mewn pentrefi eithaf torfol, a chi'n disgwyl byddai e'n gweithio mewn pentrefi poblog, ond na... Bore 'ma, fel esiampl dda, dwi di gael tri aelod staff gyda 'Teams' ddim yn gweithio, neu mae e'n glitchy, felly hwnna yw'r pen tost penna.'

> 'In terms of geography, and where we are, it's a nightmare for some staff. And some live in pretty crowded villages, and you would expect that it would work in populated villages, but no ... This morning, as a good example, I've had three members of staff with 'Teams' not working , or it's glitchy, so that's the ultimate headache.' (SLI, A5)

5.37   As in the example above, the difficulty with connectivity was also emphasised as a particular problem in rural areas,

> 'Because we live in such a rural area, the teachers were having issues with the internet, as well as well as the pupils. So, in some cases it proved difficult in even uploading assignments because their Internet was so poor.' (SLI, A1)

5.38   In one case ten staff members in one school suffered from these issues, forcing them to travel from home to find to mobile phone data, to either travel to school to work for short periods, or receive a 'Mi-Fi'.

Workload

5.39   In addition to challenges with IT it was generally accepted (across all schools) that the period was and continuous to be extremely challenging. In the words of one contributor, there was a 'definite' growth in the pressure on

teachers. The individual noted the need for significant change for all staff at the beginning of the 'massive' lockdown period,

> 'Dwi di fod yn dysgu am 30 mlynedd, a dyma'r cyfnod gwaethaf erioed o bell ffordd.'

> 'I've been teaching for 30 years, and it's by far the worst time ever.' (SLI, A4)

5.40   This feeling of increasing workload was also corroborated by other interviewees,

> 'O'ni o flaen y gliniadur o fore gwyn tan nos achos oni'n ceisio fod 'na i bawb, boed yn rheini neu staff. Roedd e'n drwm!'

> 'I was in front of the laptop from dawn till dusk because you try to be there for everyone, both parents or staff. It was intense!' (SLI, A5)

> 'Less confident staff felt they were always on call to parents' (SLI, C3)

5.41   One individual also noted that the increasing pressure was a consistent feature and hasn't declined since March of 2020,

> 'Ni di bod wrthi ers mis Mawrth heb yr un brêc. Hyd yn oed yn ystod gwyliau'r haf mi oedd na dal pethau'n codi...'

> 'We've been at it since March without any brake. Even during the summer holidays, things were continue to crop up ...' (SLI, A4)

5.42   One feature also highlighted was the tendency to feel the need to constantly be online to help children. Some felt that even during the holidays,

> '…fod rhaid bod ar y we trwy'r amser er mwyn cefnogi plant a rheini.'

> 'Always have to be on the internet to support children and parents' (SLI, A4)

5.43   This involved trying to manage workload and ensure teachers' commitment to acceptable working hours. However, in another case it was noted that despite efforts to secure a break, the pressure of work remained difficult,

'The Summer [holidays] came, and ... our head said to us, 'right, during the first two weeks you down tools and you don't do anything,' and we did. We literally downed tools and didn't do anything... [But] the last three weeks were spend projecting forward. As an SLT we were in, we were planning, we were looking at the guidance, and making sure we had the right set up in school.' (SLI, A1)

5.44   Despite the challenges, some schools noted that staff worked together to try and share the workload wherever they could,

'Teachers shared the workload on the plans and the activities, all story based, fun based and just trying to engage them as much as we can, really' (SLI, B3)

5.45   One contributor reported that parental expectations during the second lockdown were greater than the first due to the fact that no-one knew how long the lockdown would be and the future was a very uncertain at that point. The role of the SLT in schools was critical in managing this new working environment for staff and the implications for their workload. There are positive messages from teacher and managers about how they acknowledge and tried to support this different way of working:

'This was a different way of working. SLT had to put well-being first and make sure that staff had down-time… internal support networks were key and we also had to be mindful of the impact of parent demands on staff and their perceptions of what the school should be doing.' (SLI C3)

Staff wellbeing

5.46   Due to the intense pressure over the numerous lockdown periods (as expressed above), the need to support staff during this time was clearly evident. Brief conversations when staff happened to encounter each other, whether on campus, or beyond, during the lockdown was a means of

supporting one another. However, opportunities for this were limited during the lockdown periods.

5.47   On returning to campus, one contributor mentioned how a 'buddy' system for staff was set up:

> '…so that staff can actually talk to each other. It sounds really daft, but before COVID-19 hit there was a lot of social interaction. But now, with social distancing in the staff room, and with you not being able to come together for meetings, staff are not talking to one another enough - just for a chat. Sometimes you come out of a lesson and you just need that moan and that whinge... and to have that buddy to ... go and have a coffee and a chat outside.' (SLI, A1)

5.48   It seems that the biggest pressure, was on senior management teams, to ensure that their fellow educators, and additional staff, had the necessary help and support during the lockdown periods.

5.49   The nature of the support provided by senior management varied. One school reported that the senior management team undertook the occasional maintenance of welfare calls to ensure the welfare of their staff. However, in another case, one institution used the school structures to assist. Members of the senior management team and middle managers spoke to one another, and they and additional staff spoke to each other to ensure staff wellbeing. It was possible, therefore, to ensure that issues and concerns for staff were discussed, as well as being passed on to specific managers to respond to.

5.50   However, in an unexpected response, one contributor noted that the pressure on him not to change that much during the initial lockout period. Although the pressure increased a little after returning to face-to-face teaching. Indeed, some co-workers, also indicated that they felt guilty that they hadn't worked harder during the initial lockdown period.

> '…teimlo'n euog cyn lleied oedden nhw'n neud. Roedden nhw'n teimlo bo dim lot o waith i neud o gwbl [yn ystod y clo mawr], ac roedden nhw'n teimlo, wedi dychwelyd, fod rhad iddyn nhw neud lan am hynny.

Mae e'n dibynnu ar yr athro/athrawes. Ond dwi ddim yn meddwl, o ran oriau, fod e di cynyddu'r baich.'

'…felt guilty no matter what they did. They felt that there was not a lot of work to do at all [during the big lock], and they felt that, in return, they needed to make up for that. It depends on the teacher. But I don't think, in terms of hours, it increased the burden.' (SLI, A3)

5.51   One key aspect, where staff workload did increase substantially was in relation to the school hubs. There was additional pressure for those staff working in the hubs, interacting with learners, often with profound needs, they were unaware of. However, it also proved to be stressful for those teachers who were unable to attend the hubs,

'There were some staff who could not man the hub for medical reasons... and then the rest of us would go to do out two days a week there. The Teams meetings were really helpful for us, because they allowed those members who couldn't come in to see us, and to make sure we were all ok and that we hadn't contracted COVID-19. Because anxiety levels from going into a new school, where we were not aware of who the children are, and where we do not know the children as they're not from our school, and with COVID-19 in the mix, there were quite high levels of anxiety, So, having that online presence with each other was really helpful in allowing us to talk through things.' (SLI, A2)

5.52   One school reported choosing not to do a hub during the first lockdown and remained open for key worker children. This was seen as a positive move for this school and they created a rota for all staff which included the head teacher, in order to minimise the time in school. Teachers were providing learning in school when they were on the rota and also providing learning from home. This school acknowledged that changed during the second lockdown. The school continued to provide thematic learning as they had done during the first lockdown.

'We knew that parents would be expecting more. So, second time around, we had teachers at home because I knew there'd be a lot more expectation. I was in with teaching assistants providing the critical worker care and vulnerable learners. Teachers were home. They were going slightly loopy by the end of it bless them, because the expectation we knew would be greater.' (SLI, B2)

5.53   However the main pressure, as another contributor noted, came from the uncertainty

'o beidio â gwybod beth oedd yn dod'

'of not knowing what was coming' (SLI, A4)

5.54   This concern was widespread across several schools. One contributor commented on how the general uncertainty of staff about developments as a result of government announcements led to the setting up of a WhatsApp group to provide updates, and to answer any questions or comments. It was,

'rhywbeth syml oedd yn gweithio yn arbennig o dda'

'Something simple that worked particularly well' (SLI, A4)

5.55   The use of messaging platforms also contributed to the staff feeling that the voice of staff was listened to, as they were able to ask questions over such platforms. Ensuring their voices were heard was a critical consideration in many organizations. One school set up an email account:

'…where staff can e-mail any of their concerns or worries, and there will be a central … team , and we will see if we can solve any problems. Because, at the end of the day, you go home, have tea and sit down and think what's happened today. So, if you can put that in an e-mail and just get rid of it, rather than sleeping on it, we hope that that can help them...' (SLI, A1)

5.56   Linked to the above was the need to respond to the wide range of obstacles and incidents that arose in the lives of staff. There was often a need for support, and flexibility from the school:

'Ma rhaid trio fod yn hyblyg gyda phobol gydag anghenion gwahanol, er enghraifft o fod gyda theulu, o fod gyda theulu yn hunan ynysu a phethau fel hyn. Ma just eisiau trio gwrando gymaint â ni'n gallu.'

'You have to try to be flexible with people with different needs, for example being with family, being with family in isolation and things like that. We just want to try to listen as much as possible.' (SLI, A3)

5.57 To help with this, another school mentioned that they took action to ensure,

'…we have more people on the supply list, so if we have a situation where a number of staff have to be off then we have those supply teachers.' (SLI, A1)

5.58 Coupled with the support above, dealing with frustration and anxiety over shortcomings in ICT skills was a major issue. This, it seems, was a notable problem among cohorts of older teachers. Some were 'extremely stressed' about the experience of transferring to distance teaching, and found the job frustrating despite the training. Even the simplest essentials, such as accessing software, and installing work on the particular software, presented a significant and long-term difficulty. In addition, teaching confidence was found to vary significantly from the classroom context, to the online environment. One contributor noted that he had discovered that some of his fellow staff members who had a wealth of classroom experience was

'...nerfus iawn o ran mynd o flaen fideo'

'very nervous about getting in front of a video' (SLI, A4)

'Staff were anxious about live lessons and opening themselves up to parental views' (SLI, C1)

'Pressures through being "observed" all the time' (SLI, C2)

5.59 More generally, policies had been implemented to ensure that staff could work from home. There were some exceptions for site meetings, to carry out necessary campus work, and in cases where there was no engagement at

home. But, in general, everyone worked from home to ensure the health and safety of staff.

5.60   All staff meetings were also organised on platforms such as Teams. These were seem as effective sessions for sharing information, and for identifying developments, but also, according to one contributor, represented an effective way of sensing staff moods, although the online technology had some limitations when compared to seeing the person face to face.

5.61   When returning to face-to-face learning, there was a need to ensure that significant support remained in place for staff. As one contributor noted,

> '…some teachers returning in September had a real shock with moving around and the kids staying where they are. They found it quite difficult in carrying things around, and not having their own classroom where they knew where everything is.' (SLI, A1)

5.62   The feeling of 'not having that base for them to call their own' further complicated the challenge of returning to school,

> '…they're struggling... and they're tired. There are face masks, and visors, and all the rest… teaching virtually and teaching through blended means. We have these, but now, additionally you are confined to a desk, and a lot of teachers tend to walk around when they teach...and then you have to perch yourself, two metres away from everyone, and then you've got to stand there and lecture...It's a difference.' (SLI, A1)

5.63   In addition, some staff across schools felt very nervous about returning to school, and face-to-face contact with children at times when incidents were still relatively high in the community. They continued to worry, especially during those times when increasing incidents were being reported in the area. As a result, many staff become upset, and frustrated that no further steps were taken to close the school.

Provision for learners - Initial lockdown

5.64   The initial learning provision provided for learners during the first lockdown identified the difference in approaches across key stages (these differences highlighted in one school are highlighted in table 12).

Table 5.3: Example of pedagogical approaches according to key stage used by one school during the initial lockdown

Key Stage	Pedagogical Approach
Foundation Phase	Respond to the changing situation with starter paper packages with suitable work provided. As they evolved, they were given work on the school website and communicated with their parents through 'Parentmail'. Through this the work was distributed, along with support and guidance to their parents. Later, they committed to transfer those learners to Teams.
Key Stage 2	Straight to Teams, with individual teams for each class. To assist with the initial move to distance learning, starter packs were also provided. However, the pressure was to get them online as soon as possible, and provide work and provide feedback, on a daily basis. Work was offered with video presentations, and live feedback sessions were also offered. Teams continue to be used for setting and receiving homework.
Key Stages 3 and 4	Secondary learners were already using 'Show My Homework' for homework delivery. This was already in place, so that route was continued in the early days of the initial lockdown period. Some were also familiar with 'E-sgol', the distance learning model. Learners were generally allocated core tasks on Mondays, and non-core tasks on Wednesdays.
Learners with ALN / EAL	Work was tailored to individuals' needs.

5.65   Another responder from a different school noted that the responses included providing, cross-curricular hard copies of work/resources. However, by the

end of the initial lockdown period, the provision had been revised to offer a specific timetable of distance learning, with live sessions taking place around the normal school day timetable :

> 'Rydyn ni'n gallu cynnig lot fwy o strwythur erbyn hyn. Rydyn ni'n gallu cynnig diwrnod ysgol, mwy neu lai, just o bell, sydd yn newid anferth.'

> 'We can now offer a lot more structure. We can offer a school day, almost remotely, which is a huge change.' (SLI, A3)

5.66   Another school spoke about one platform for the infants and a different one for the juniors. This school had not really used online platforms in a meaningful way before the first lockdown noting;

> 'Our infants use, we use Purple Mash, which is where the infants have gone down the route for home learning and the juniors have done Google classroom which is linked to Hwb, the Welsh Government platform… So the junior teachers upped their use of Google classroom with the children in the classroom. So we had some sort of idea of how to use it because really before that, they hadn't really used Google Classroom before. There wasn't really any need because of all being in the classroom.' (SLI, B1)

5.67   The primary educational focus, among all institutions during the initial lockdown, was on maintaining core subjects i.e. language, mathematics. In the early days of the lockdown period, in particular, there was a desire to

> 'cadw nhw i fynd er mwyn bo' nhw ddim yn cwympo nôl'

> 'Keep them going so they don't fall behind.' (SLI, A3)

5.68   A respondent also indicated that the initial provision focused on the acquisition of essential skills, but, in line with this, there was also an opportunity to include some innovation. The respondent discussed how cross-curricular packages were produced for their key stage 3 learners, in an attempt to ensure a comprehensive focus on core aspects, while also

preparing and developing cross-curricular teaching methods as part of the new curriculum.

> 'Wnaethon ni cael pecynnau traws-cwricwlaidd a gosod themâu. Dwi ddim yn meddwl themâu yw'r ffordd i fynd o ran y cwricwlwm newydd, ond mae e wedi bod yn gam cyntaf da er mwyn cael pobol i weithio mewn ffordd well gyda'i gilydd a bydd rhai adolygu hynny wrth i ni fynd ymlaen.'

> 'We got cross-curricular packages and set themes. I don't think themes are the way to go in terms of the new curriculum, but it has been a good first step in getting people to work better together and there will be some reviewing that as we go along.' (SLI, A3)

5.69   However, all respondents also acknowledged that the initial move to online learning had also impacted their ability to educate effectively, as,

> 'when the children are in school it's far easier for us to model, and to teach, and to show them over a period of time.' (SLI, A2)

5.70   One school noted expressed concern for the year six children given that they were aware that things were going on, because of the media.

> 'We didn't know what to say to them really, because there was that unknown. But we wanted to prepare them, in case they didn't have a chance to come back. And that was quite difficult, dealing with that upset.' (SLI, B3)

Provision for learners - Developing provision

5.71   Several contributors noted that their distance learning strategies developed and evolved over time. As one contributor mentioned previously, at the outset there was a misconception among many that the form of distance teaching was limited to live sessions. Although this became the cornerstone of the efforts of nearly all the schools, in due course, there were also other strategies that were adopted:

> 'Mae pawb yn meddwl fod dysgu o bell yn meddwl ffrydio byw, ac mae dyna be sy yn y peth. Ond mae e wedi bod yn job o addysgu i gael yr athrawon i ddeall beth ydy dysgu cyfunol, a'r gwahanol bethau chi'n gallu neud. Pethau fel defnyddio FlipGrid, Adobe Spark, ac mi oedd cael y sgyrsiau na yn beth mawr ohono fe.'

> 'Everyone thinks that distance learning means live streaming, and that that's what it is. It's been a job of educating teachers to understand what blended learning is, and the different things you can do. Things like using FlipGrid, Adobe Spark, and having those conversations was a big part of it.' (SLI, A3)

5.72 On this basis it was possible to significantly alter the educational provision based on broadening the understanding of the alternative platforms available to teachers.

5.73 The initial survey captured the range of software applications that schools were using and the SL interviews confirmed what was being used. Another respondent referred to the schools use of Flip Grid, Show My Homework, Just2easy, G Suite for Education and TT Rockstars software. This, therefore, highlighted a desire to provide the provision based on the support available through HWB, but also by adopting equipment not included in the HWB as well, as in the case of TT Rockstars and Maths Watch.

5.74 Schools developed provision that was appropriate for their learning communities and this was both technology and paper-based including learning packs.

5.75 As a result of the confusion initially in not knowing the extent of the first lockdown. One school acknowledged that once the news came out that schools would be closed after the Easter break, they would have to rethink their initial response to the lockdown and review their approach to online learning and how this could be accessible to everyone.

> 'So, we went down the route of using our website because it was well established and parents knew to look for information on the website. It

was linked to an App as well, so they could get notifications straight onto their phones.' (SLI, B3)

5.76 There is evidence from the interviews with senior leaders that surveys and consultations with parents took place to discuss the volume of work and the approaches that the schools were using. For example based on consultation, one school made a conscious decision to not provide synchronous sessions.

'Synchronous not equitable for learners' (SLI, C3)

5.77 The same school developed a structure that provided clarity and time for questions for parents.

'The Early Years co-ordinator on Sundays sent out materials for the week and teachers were available throughout the week for parents to contact for help' (SLI, C3)

5.78 The data provides evidence of how schools reflected on their approaches and how they adapted and developed to support learners

'We recognised a need for learners to see the adults and created planned lessons with recorded intros so learners saw their teacher.' (SL1, C1)

5.79 A number of schools wished to highlight the important role that TAs played in supporting learners during lockdowns and the return to face-to-face teaching.

'Teaching assistants should be highlighted as important and a strength. They engaged with additional training in their own time and provided essential support' (SLI, C1)

Supporting learners – Access to technology

5.80 Learners' access to technology was a BIG problem that came to light with the move to distance learning. One of the biggest surprises, as one respondent noted, was finding that some learners (and this was most evident among secondary learners) coped with no access to technology at all:

> 'Roedd lot mawr o rieni a theuluoedd heb ddim un cyfarpar o gwbl.
> Roedd e'n synnu fi sut yr oedd pobl yn dod i ben gyda rhedeg eu
> bywyd heb unrhyw fath o fynediad ar-lein y dyddiau yma!'

> 'A lot of parents and families had no equipment at all. It amazed me
> how people ended up running their lives with no form of online access
> these days!' (SLI, A4)

5.81 All schools, therefore, noted that they often had to distribute devices, such
as laptops and tablets for learners to engage with the teaching process. The
process of conducting the survey to ascertain which students had access to
hardware, was 'quite a headache' for staff as the most common method of
distributing the questionnaires (e-mail), was not available for those who were
are targeted by the survey. It was imperative, therefore, to seek an
alternative form of engagement with those learners, and their parents. In one
all-through school a total of 60 electronic devices were provided for pupils.

5.82 In other cases, even when individuals had access to some form of device,
many learners suffered from a lack of access to adequate equipment for
distance learning needs. For example, many noted that some educators and
pupils only had access to old hardware that was extremely slow, and could
not cope with live streaming requirements, as well as other learning
requirements. Furthermore, one contributor noted:

> 'Roedd rhai pobl yn trio defnyddio ffonau symudol i lawr lwytho pethau,
> ond roedd maint y sgrin yn fach iawn, ac roedd yn anodd iawn i
> ddefnyddio hynna i weithredu drwy Teams.'

> 'Some people tried using mobile phones to download things, but the
> screen size was very small, and it was very difficult to use that to
> operate through Teams.' (SLI, A3)

5.83 One school reported concerns about children being able to access learning
on-line due to the fact that they were in an area of high deprivation and this
influenced their choice of activities and how the children would have access.

'We were very conscious because of the area that we were in. It was an area of high deprivation and the activities, we couldn't ask them to buy anything special. So we had to think through those activities very carefully. We used links to YouTube a lot because we knew the majority of children would have that and they could access that on game stations and things like that. We were also conscious that we didn't want to give activities that needed a laptop or a computer because a lot of the parents in our area were just accessing the website on their mobile phones. So they were all paper-based activities.' (SLI, B3)

5.84   In addition, although, it was acknowledged that some support with connectivity, via 'mi-fi' hubs was offered by Welsh Government, the schools often found it necessary to go that extra step and also offer additional support to pupils using their own support networks to provide appropriate hardware for pupils,

'I wouldn't necessarily say it was all Welsh Government (WG) [support]. They provided the mini hubs... but all the laptops came from the school. All of our cluster schools came together...and we liaised with heads to find out how many children needed a laptop and we cobbled all our laptops together...and allowed those laptops to go home... The laptops came from us, and the mini hubs from WG.' (SLI, A1)

5.85   However, according to respondents, although most pupils were able to access the internet through various means, there were continued and consistent connectivity issues in some cases, with some learners (and teachers) having to change location to find an internet 'hotspot' or a decent 3G or 4G connection. The whole process highlighted a form of postcode lottery, with the connectivity provision playing a distinctive role. This put some learners at a significant disadvantage as can be seen in the following comment,

'Mae 'na phlant sydd, efallai, yn ymuno, ond dydyn nhw methu siarad achos dydy'r sain ddim yn gweithio, neu dydyn nhw ddim yn gweld o achos fod y cwbl yn pixelated, a ma na eraill yn clywed ond ddim yn gweld. Felly, ma hwnna'n rhywbeth dyddiol.'

'There are children who may be joining, but they can't talk because the sound doesn't work, or they don't see because it's all pixelated, and others hear but don't see . So, that's something every day.' (SLI, A5)

Supporting learners – Vulnerable learners and well-being of learners

5.86   Schools recognised the importance of supporting its vulnerable learners and the well-being of all learners.

5.87   During lockdown ensuring schools were able to continue to look after and support vulnerable learners was important. One school reported;

> 'We identified the group of children that we thought were vulnerable. And we did and constant contact home phone calls. We offered them places in school. We also asked to speak to the children on the phone because you can generally gauge from children's reactions how things are going. And we did feedback to social services as much as we possibly could as to what we if there were any concerns that were being raised.' (SLI, B4)

5.88   Another school referred to vulnerable children in families where social services are involved;

> 'We've got five to six, possibly seven families at that sort of level. And they're the ones I've tried to really target. And if I hadn't heard from, keep emailing them and texting them and say, just let me know you're Okay. And they would in the end. We did have some Safeguarding issues.. And so I did get in touch with children services about that and I did do a referral on that and they looked into it.' (SLI, B1)

Pupil engagement online

5.89 Several respondents noted that pupils engagement with online learning was variable. There was an element of novelty to it initially, but after a while the lack of direct engagement with teachers, and the inability of teachers to ensure direct engagement with the teaching process, and to reassure them, meant that some pupils lost interest. As a result,

> 'Roedd rhai plant yn defnyddio fe pob dydd, ac yn rheolaidd, ac yn fanwl iawn, ac mi oedd eraill ddim yn defnyddio fe o gwbl'

> 'Some children used it every day, on a regular basis, with great precision, and others didn't use it at all.' (SLI, A3)

5.90 One respondent suggested that engagement tended to vary from subject to subject. A few subjects, where some form of blended learning or use of platforms was already taking place, prior to lockdown i.e. in mathematics with the use of TT Rockstars or Maths Watch, tended to be higher than in other subjects where online provision was still being developed. This cross-references with the findings in the initial survey of the main apps that were being used to support learners.

5.91 Schools' knowledge of their learners differed across the sample. Two schools had family engagement roles and they were very instrumental in understanding the circumstances of their learners and designing and providing appropriate support. However. the circumstances of the individual learners were not always known to teachers, so several respondents noted that no additional pressure was put on learners if they failed to engage for relatively short periods. It was speculated that the illness of family members, or losses in the family as a result of the pandemic could play a role in this lack of engagement.

5.92 Linked to the comment above, one respondent also noted that the school's practice in assigning assignments online may have contributed to individuals' feeling of academic pressure and subsequent lack of engagement,

'Roedd rhai yn ymdopi, a rhai eraill wedyn yn struglo 'chydig bach gyda'r nifer o dasgau oedden nhw'n cael ... a gyda chwblhau'r gwaith.'

'Some coped, others struggled a little with the number of tasks they were given ... and with completing the work.' (SLI, A3)

5.93   In response to some pupils lack of engagement, another respondent noted that, for the benefit of their learners, they varied the tasks set to ensure that learners did not sit near a screen all day, and were able to undertake easy tasks. They used,

'…tasks where children could see something on the laptop and then go away and do it. Weather that's something to do with mini beasts or making an ug house. Because the weather was lovely we had a lot of outside activities which children could go away and do so that they weren't totally focused on a device.' (SLI A2)

5.94   In some cases, respondents noted that the change to online learning boosted some pupils ability to work independently and was seen to have a positive impact on specific pupils engagement. It also allowed others to return to subjects and topics that they didn't fully comprehend at first, pupils who may have been unwilling to voice their uncertainty in the classroom,

'Ma nhw'n gallu mynd nôl dros bethau rydym ni wedi recordio, a ma adborth y plant wedi bod yn rili dda. Ac yn enwedig... gyda'r rhai mwy tawel yn y dosbarth, a falle archolladwy. Nhw sydd wedi joio fe mwy. Oni'n ffeindio fod y rhai tawel yn ymuno mewn lot mwy yn y gwersi.'

'They can go back over things we have recorded, and the feedback from the children has been really good. And especially ... with the quieter ones in the class, and maybe vulnerable. They have enjoyed it more. I found that the quiet ones tended to join in a lot more in the lessons.' (SLI, A3)

5.95   Several respondents referred to a shift in focus after the initial school closures to concentrate on feedback rather than assessment. This was in often seen as need to respond to pupils differing situations

'…wnaethon ni rhoi pwyslais mawr ar les yn ystod y cyfnod cau cyntaf, doedden i ddim eisiau rhoi straen neu bwysau ar fyfyrwyr, so roedden ni'n dweud fod ddim deadlines. Os chi'n gallu gwneud y gwaith, ac os ych chi'n gallu hala fe mewn at athrawon, yna wnawn ni cynnig adborth - dim marcio, ond adborth. Doedd ddim lot o 'take up' ar hynny.'

'…we put a big emphasis on wellbeing during the first shutdown, we didn't want to put stress or pressure on students, so we said no deadlines. If you can do the work, and you send it in to the teachers, then they will offer feedback - no marking, just feedback. There wasn't a lot of 'up-take' on that.' (SLI, A3)

5.96 Several respondents also noted that providing effective feedback was difficult initially. However several strategies were then developed i.e. one to one live feedback sessions, marking books by using Moodle, Show my Homework, and software such as Screen Castify, Flip Grid and videos. This also enhanced the quality of the feedback provided and this aided in an increased level of pupil engagement.

5.97 In addition, to optimise pupil engagement and to ensure vulnerable pupils (who did not have access to adequate devices/connection were able to engage) several noted that they would record sessions as needed. However, another school indicated that they followed a comprehensive timetable with times sessions allocated for different age groups.

5.98 When trying to ascertain the level of student engagement, several respondents also recognised the usefulness of teams in collating statistics on individual learners. This data could be closely monitored and additional attempts to contact the pupil could be made is engagement was low over an extended period.

5.99 A positive outcome noted by 3 primary schools was that they could see the development of more independent learners based on this experience. This would be something that they would like to develop further,

'The blended learning approach has developed a new independence in our learners' (SL1, C2)

Pupil wellbeing

5.100   The welfare of the learners, in educational terms, and in terms of their general well-being, was a central consideration for all the schools during this period. Several schools noted that they would arrange welfare calls to check up on students and families, 'We were doing welfare calls, so we were finding out which students were struggling with the use of Teams and we would then get calls to them.' (SLI, A1)

5.101   Further use of platforms and proficiency of using platforms by staff also aided in combating loneliness, and ensuring pupils felt they were still part of the school community,

> 'Ma nhw'n teimlo fel bod systemau gyda ni mewn lle sydd yn addas, a'u bod nhw'n gweithio. Ma nhw dal yn teimlo'n rhan o'r ysgol hyd yn oed os nag ydyn nhw yma, yn wirioneddol.'

> 'They feel like we have systems in place that are suitable, and that they work. They still feel part of the school even if they aren't really here.' (SLI, A3)

5.102   This is further highlighted in the comment below,

> '[creating teams groups] gave children the time to talk amongst each other [in addition to the opportunity to discuss issues with teachers.] Most children will catch up academically, or have done so already, but it's the social thing that children have really missed. They have really missed that interaction with friends and with their peer groups... Having that little chat [daily] really helped children and let them know that they were all still there, even if they couldn't see each other.' (SLI, A2)

5.103   When returning to school after the initial lockdown, the continuous need to isolate and deal with new cases continued to have a detrimental effect on pupils as seen in the example below,

> '[One year group] has been hit with 3 positive cases, so, for example, one student I spoke to had just come back from a 14 day isolation ... and had done one previously as well. She had been in school for three days and she had been off for 28 days! She nearly burst in to tears with me when she knew she had to go home and do this all online again. All our phone calls due to a positive case have been on the weekend... so we could not allow those kids to come in on a Monday morning. So, we have literally had to tell kids at 7:30pm on a Sunday night that they won't be coming in on Monday... So, we have been on the end of a phone telling their parents that they won't be coming in. But there was this one case which was at 11:00 am [on a school day] so we had to bring all the kids that had had contract into the theatre and tell them that they weren't allowed to go home on the bus and so on. And you could see the effects of what we were telling them, and it was like 'I have another 14 days of being at home, and I just can't be dealing with any mor of this. I just do not want to go back online. I want to see my friends. I want to learn. I want to be in school. And at that point you just realised, good God, this is affecting them. This is really having a negative effect on their mental wellbeing.' (SLI, A1)

5.104   In response to cases, such as the one highlighted above, some schools noted that the frequency of calls to those pupils that needed to self-isolate were increased to allow them to have contact with the school on a regular basis,

> 'Parents are probably working at home and trying their best [with work]...It's just about having someone to talk to, and knowing that they can ring the school if they need to talk to us.' (SL1, A1)

5.105   However, several respondents also noted that they were surprised by pupils ability to adapt to the ever changing set of circumstances,

'Ma resiliance y plant yn anhygoel. Ma nhw di addasu i'r amserlenni gwahanol, a bod gwahanol ddosbarthiadau mas ar amser chwarae gwahanol, a bod pawb yn eu 'zone' amser chwarae. Yn ystod clybiau brecwast pryd ma gan bawb eu bwrdd, ac amser cinio'r un peth... Dydyn nhw ddim di cwestiynu'r peth, ond just clatsho bant.'

'The resilience of the children is amazing. They have adapted to different schedules, and different classes, they're out at different playtimes, and everyone is in their playtime zone. During breakfast clubs everyone has their table, and lunch time is the same ... They have not questioned it, but just got on with it.' (SLI, A5)

Support at home – Support from parents

5.106   A trend highlighted as particularly important in promoting learners' commitment to their education during the lock-up period was the level of support and assistance available to them at home. Parents generally had a desire to see their children engaged with the teaching process and complete tasks to the best of their ability. In those cases where parental awareness of the technological platforms already existed there was considerable support because,

'Parents were used to logging in and supporting learners' (SL1, A2)

5.107   However, where the processes were new, and foreign, and given the additional pressures already highlighted by Cofid-19, there were parents who didn't or weren't able to offer the same kind of support. As one contributor noted,

'roedd rhai rhieni just yn penderfynu peidio gwneud dim o lawer'

'some parents just decided not to do much of anything.' (SLI, A4)

5.108   Several respondents noted that parents thought that it was the responsibility of the school to offer educational support for their children's learning. Based on this, and the lack of encouragement from parents for their children to

engage with the teaching process, some 'completely' withdrew from the process during the initial lockdown period and despite the school's best efforts to engage parents or guardians this continued to be a constant challenge:

> 'roedden ni'n cael trafferth i gael hyd i deuluoedd ar y ffôn. Roedden ni'n trial a trial ffonio ond ddim yn cael ateb... Roedd e'n gyfnod eithaf heriol.'

> 'We were struggling to contact families on the phone. We were trying a phone call but not getting an answer ... It was quite a challenging time.' (SLI, A4)

5.109 On some occasions, schools noted that, even when contact was made there was a denial, whether deliberately, or on the basis of ignorance, of their children's failings:

> 'Roedden nhw'n dweud weithiau, o, "ie, mae e'n mynd ar Teams yn ddyddiol." Ond roedden ni'n dweud, "wel, sori, ni'n tracio a ni'n gallu gweld yn union [faint mae wedi mynychu] a dydyn nhw heb fod arno fe ers mis!" Y fath na o senarios oedden ni'n cael.'

> 'They used to say sometimes, oh, "yes, he goes on Teams daily." But we said, well, "sorry, we tracked and we could see exactly [how much he attends] and they haven't been on it for a month!" That kind of scenarios.' (SLI, A3)

5.110 In addition, several respondents saw the lockdown period, and the move to distance learning, and therefore the lack of engagement of their children as an issue triggered by the education system. In this, they were critical of those individuals that they thought were responsible for keeping their children home. A contributor noted:

> 'Blynyddoedd yn ôl roedd rhieni yn diolch am bob peth, ond mae 'na garfan nawr yn barod iawn i gwyno os nad ydyn nhw'n cael y ddarpariaeth maen nhw eisiau - neu yn meddwl eu bod nhw'n teilyngu. Mae hynna di cicio mewn yn y blynyddoedd diwethaf.'

> 'Years ago parents were grateful for everything, but there is now a group ready to complain if they are not getting the provision they want - or think they deserve. That has kicked in in recent years.' (SLI, A4)

5.111   One respondent noted that the school had transformed the way that they publicly engaged with parents. One step in this was to take a step to upgrade the website, making it a much easier tool to use:

> 'Ni wedi defnyddio cwmni lleol er mwyn gwella'r wefan. Mae'r wefan nawr yn holl newydd, ac yn ''unrecognisable' i'r hyn oedd yna o'r blaen.'

> 'We used a local company to improve the website. The site is now all new, and 'unrecognisable' to what it was before.' (SLI, A3)

5.112   In addition, the school also took steps to improve and ensure the school had a clear presence on social media platforms:

> '...[er mwyn] sign postio a just cael y 'buy in' o rieni ni di mynd i'r afael a'r cyfryngau cymdeithasol a chael rhywun mewn i reoli hwnna. Ni di cael aelod o'r uwch dim yn y gorffennol, ond dyw e just ddim yn digwydd. Os wyt ti fishi just sdim amser da ti neud y gwaith. Ma cyfryngau cymdeithasol yn real sgil arbennig, a ma defnyddio fe'n dda yn cymryd amser a ma rhaid ti wybod be ti'n neud.'

> '...[in order] to sign post and just get the 'buy in' from our parents we have to take to social media and get someone in control of that. We have had a member of the senior team in the past, but it's just not happening. If you're busy you just don't have time to do the work. Social media is a real skill, and using it well takes time and you have to know what you're doing. ' (SLI, A3)

5.113   One school used the return to school in September 2020 as an opportunity to survey parents and teachers about a low engagement with online learning during the first lockdown. This gave the school an opportunity to completely revise their online offering and they created a new website.

'I started to tell parents that all the information I would be sharing would be on our website, to get them used to using it. We set up a very similar home learning area on the website and when the children were in school, we taught them how to use it. So by putting it on the website with no passwords or anything needed, we found engagement was a lot higher.' (SLI, B3)

5.114   However, in some extremely limited cases, there have been instances where social websites have become locations for unacceptable parental behaviour:

'Ceir achosion... lle mae disgybl wedi gofyn cwestiwn i athro/athrawes yn ystod y gwyliau, a dim wedi cael ateb yn syth achos fod yr aelod staff ar wyliau. Wedi hynny ni di cael comments wedi gadael ar luniau [ar y cyfryngau cymdeithasol]. Achos fod y gallu gyda ni i weithio o bell, mae'n anodd rheoli'r disgwyliadau fod athrawon ar gael 24/7 i ateb cwestiynau.'

'There are cases ... where a pupil has asked a teacher a question during the holidays, and has not received an immediate answer because the member of staff is on holiday. After that we had comments left on photos [on social media]. Because we have the ability to work remotely, it is difficult to manage the expectations that teachers will be available 24/7 to answer questions.'

Support at home – Support for parents

5.115   In the best interests of learners, respondents also referred to the need to ensure that processes were in place that allowed schools to offer support and guidance for parents. One contributor, referred to the creation of various videos to assist parents with their children's school work, information on how they could assist them in presenting that work, as well as how to source materials, including streaming sessions living, to aid their education. In addition, teachers would create examples for the parents to aid them in understanding the necessary steps to complete the task with their children.

Training sessions were also offered online which again offered 'step by step' guidance for parents. This additional support was offered after it was clear that many parents and guardians were experiencing difficulties,

> 'Yn yr wythnosau cyntaf 'na gyd oni'n neud oedd eistedd adre yn ymateb i alwadau'r rhieni ynglŷn â usernames, passwords, a sut oedd gwneud hwn, a sut oedd lan lwytho a'r fath yna o beth achos bod e'n newydd. Roedden ni wedi cael peth amser i esbonio i'r plant yng nghyfnod allweddol 2, ond dim digon o fanylder iddyn nhw fod yn hunan cynhaliol...'

> 'In the first few weeks all I did was sit at home responding to parents' calls about usernames, passwords, and how to do this, and how to upload and that kind of thing because it was new. We had some time to explain to the children in key stage 2, but not enough detail for them to be self-sufficient...' (SLI, A4)

5.116 In addition, several respondents referred to the practice of offering intermittent welfare calls to parents. In other schools this was done on a weekly basis particularly with known vulnerable families. Most parents appreciated calls, and queries about their their well-being as the period progressed, and respondents from schools where this practice was adopted indicated that they were beneficial.

5.117 The need to support parents, as well as the children, was a role that schools recognised was key to supporting the children too. This is outlined in this quote from one school.

> 'Because we were aware that some of the parents in our area, they were reliant on the takeaways and they weren't used to home cooking. And of course, everything was closed. So we were conscious that they need to be fed. And some parents only had the microwave and things like that. So we tried to do as much as we could really to help the parents as well. And we put quite a few recipes on there, very simple

recipes that they could do together with the children. There was a learning element, but also that would feed the family for tea.' (SLI, B3)

'Communicating with parents about levels of work. We surveyed parents to keep interactive with parents and gather their input on what is working and what isn't…Parents highlighted well-being and we communicated to parents that the new IT knowledge that the students have can open doors for them.' (SLI, C1)

Return to teaching after initial national lockdown and entering the second national lockdown

5.118   The original research proposal for this project was to look at the period March 2020 – July 2020; but as the situation changed and developed we were also able to capture the return to face to face teaching, local lockdowns and quarantines and a second national lockdown from December 2020-February 2021.

5.119   Schools reflecting on the experience from September 2020-February 2021 noted developments since the first lockdown, changes made and challenges still to manage. Some schools provided activities in the same manner as during the first lockdown but there was evidence of increased live activities, collaboration and shared understanding through consultations with parents and learners and more confidence from staff about teaching and learning in this environment.

'Sharing newsletters with parents stories to make connections' (SLI,C2)

'More focused on parental feedback' (SLI C3)

'Morning video checking to make it more personal…..Live sessions focusing on well-being' (SL1, C2)

'Home learning expanded but parents were ready for it and engagement was high' (SL1, C2)

'Choice of when and how often to connect online' (SL1, C2)

'English and maths in the morning and one activity in the afternoon focusing on well-being' (SL1, C1)

Reflections on good practice

5.120 Some schools reflected on the immediate impact and also the future impact that this experience has on how it teaches and interacts with its learners. Schools cited the following:

Theme	
Implications for learning and teaching	Realising the potential use of blended approaches in face-to-face support to support learners to meet their individual needs and it role in the new curriculum. Teachers are taking new pedagogical approaches back into the classroom
Developing learners	The opportunity to used blended approaches to develop learner independence
Professional learning	Supporting wellbeing of staff to have the freedom of when and how to access the training relevant to them.
Technology	Exploration of the role of technology to open up new opportunities
Parents	Exploring opportunities to involve parents more in the learning process

Final thoughts

'[We've learnt that] children really do value school.' (SLI, A2)

'Unwaith ti'n dechrau siarad am y peth ti'n sylweddoli beth sy' 'di digwydd, a faint o bethau ni di neud. Mae 'di bod yn neis siarad am y peth. Mae e di gneud i fi deimlo, ie, blydi hell, ni wedi gwneud lot, a di neud yn OK.'

'Once you start talking about it you realise what has happened, and how many things we have done. It's been nice to talk about it. It made me feel, yeah, hello, we've done a lot, and done OK' (SLI, A3)

'…yn gyffredinol, mae cofid wedi gwneud i ni ffocysu ar y pethau dylen ni wedi bod yn ffocysu arno. O ran lles y plant. O ran y datblygiadau yma. Mae e wedi sbarduno, ac wedi bod yn help, os rhywbeth. Dwi'n meddwl dawn ni allan yn well na sut aethon ni mewn... Kick up the arse really! Mae'n beth da.'

'…in general, COVID[-19] has made us focus on the things we should have been focusing on. In terms of the welfare of the children. In terms of these developments. It has triggered, and helped, if anything. I think we will be in a better place than when we went in ... Kick up the ass really! It's a good thing.' (SLI, A3)

Summary

5.121   The key themes identified in the data collected from senior leaders often referred to the need to continuously **adapt** their practices during the course of the pandemic, particularly in relation to the **choice of online platforms** and the **provision provided for learners.** Linked to these findings was the requirement for an increased level of **IT Support** for staff, learners and parents, with participants often referring to issues with accessing appropriate **hardware** and inconsistent levels of **connectivity** (particularly in a rural setting but also across Wales). There was also a clear emphasis in the responses on promoting and supporting **wellbeing** amongst staff and students, with an increased **workload** being a key factor for staff (specifically for senior leaders in schools). However, practitioners also took the opportunity to **reflect on good practice,** and all practitioners recognised the need to build on the skills (particularly on-line skills) developed during the lockdown.

5.122   A Summary of the key findings from the senior leader interviews can be seen below:

- A constant theme through the lockdowns was one of adapting to different types of delivery. There were periods of distance learning and

also periods of blended learning where learners were not always in school or had then face-to-face teaching interrupted by local lockdowns and quarantines. The first lockdown saw a rapid shift to distance learning.

- Schools in the sample were at different stages in their use of technology and familiarity with platforms and applications that could be used in this situation. Ultimately, some schools chose a platform that seemed to meet their own individual school's needs. Others were led by support that was available from specific LEAs.

- The move to distance learning, and the use of a wide variety of platforms to offer the provision, required significant support and training to prepare and 'upskill' teachers. Professional learning development was identified in pedagogies of technology enhanced learning, technology skills, making technology choices and models of blended and distance learning.

- Access to appropriate hardware was a challenge for both schools and learners as they developed their approaches to distance and blended learning. Several schools referred to the need to ensure staff and learners had access and use of appropriate hardware and laptops were often sought for both staff and learners.

- One consistent and key areas of technical difficulties for staff was connectivity and access to a reliable internet connection. Several contributors noted that this posed an enormous problem for a several members of staff throughout the lockdown, and this was also a key issue for learners.

- In addition to challenges with IT it was generally accepted (across all schools) that the period was extremely challenging. In the words of one contributor, there was a 'definite' growth in the pressure on teachers.

- Due to the intense pressure over the numerous lockdown periods, the need to support staff during this time was clearly evident. The use of 'buddy systems' within schools aided in supporting staff members during this time. Senior leaders were key in ensuring that staff were effectively supported during the lockdowns.

- The welfare of the learners, in educational terms, and in terms of their general well-being, was also a central consideration for all the schools during this period and schools took extraordinary steps to ensure all learners were supported effectively.

- The initial learning provision provided for learners during the first lockdown identified the difference in approaches across key stages. Several respondents referred to the need to provide online and hard-copies of work and or resources. The primary educational focus

(across sectors), during the initial lockdown, was on maintaining core subjects and core skills. However, distance learning strategies developed and evolved over time and it was possible to significantly alter the educational provision based on broadening the understanding of the alternative platforms available to teachers.

- Several respondents noted that pupils engagement with online learning was variable. There was an element of novelty to it initially, but after a while the lack of direct engagement with teachers, and the inability of teachers to ensure direct engagement with the teaching process, and to reassure them, meant that some pupils lost interest. However, others saw an increased level of independence amongst their learners.

- A trend highlighted as particularly important in promoting learners' commitment to their education during the lock-up period was the level of support and assistance available to them at home. Parents generally had a desire to see their children engaged with the teaching process and complete tasks to the best of their ability. However, the lack of encouragement from a small number of parents meant that a some learners 'completely' withdrew from the process during the initial lockdown period and despite the school's best efforts to engage parents or guardians this continued to be a constant challenge.

- In the best interests of learners, respondents also referred to the need to ensure that processes were in place that allowed schools to offer support and guidance for parents. Teachers would create examples for the parents to aid them in understanding the necessary steps to complete the task with their children and training sessions were also offered online which again offered 'step by step' guidance for parents.

- Finally, there were several references made to the use of 'good practice' during the lockdown with a general consensus for the need to continue the use online platforms and blended approaches to support learners needs and comply with the requirements of the new curriculum.

6.   Findings: Teacher Voice

6.1   One HEI partnership conducted focus groups with groups of teachers from November to January 2020, while two others used surveys conducted between March and April 2021 to gather data about teachers' experiences. The focus groups consisted of three or four teachers from different subjects and phases. In some primary focus groups, senior leaders were present and in others they were not. One HEI partnership survey gathered data from seven teachers in two primary schools, including school leaders, while the other partnership gathered data from five primary schools. The school codes are as used in the reporting of senior leader interviews.

Table 6.1: Senior Leader Codes, Type of School

	School Code	**Type of School**	**Language of Instruction**
1	A1	All through	Bilingual
2	A2	Primary	English
3	A3	Secondary	Bilingual (Mostly English)
4	A4	All through	Bilingual
5	A5	Primary	Welsh
6	B1	Primary	English
7	B2	Primary	**English**
8	C1	Primary	English
9	C2	Primary	English
10	C3	Primary	English
11	C4	Primary	English
12	C5	Primary	English

6.2   The focus groups and surveys used the same question set. Each interview was subsequently transcribed and a thematic analysis of the key and sub themes was undertaken. A similar process of thematic analysis was undertaken with the survey responses. A narrative of the themes identified and accompanying qualitative data taken from the interviews and survey

responses can be seen below and a summary of the themes can be seen in table 13.

Table 6.2: Themes from focus groups

	Themes	Sub Theme
1	Adapting	Adapting to distance Learning Phases of lockdown
2	Choice of online platforms	Flexibility
3	IT Support	Training
		Hardware
		Connectivity
4	Workload	
5	Staff wellbeing	
6	Supporting students	Flexibility in response to needs Vulnerable students
7	Learner engagement online	Challenges in different subject/phases
8	Working with parents	
9	Reflections on whole experience	Looking to the future

Adapting to distance learning

6.3   The initial transition to distance learning in March 2020 was challenging for schools and for learners in a variety of ways.

> 'It was a big jump for a lot of pupils with the first lockdown. Obviously, there were lots of technical issues…just getting to grips with how to log on and how to use Teams'. (Teacher, A1)

6.4   Attitudes and dispositions varied, with some individuals reporting that they were 'terrified' (Teacher, A3) or that the transition was a 'sioc massive' (Teacher A4) while others were more confident:

'I'm not long out of university, so going online wasn't too much of a worry'. (Teacher, A3)

6.5   Other schools had a different perspective and saw the transition in the context of work they were already doing to integrate technology into learning and teaching:

> 'We'd almost pre-prepared for this really… before lockdown. [Since] September 2019, we were already using HWB… in key stage two with J2E to actually do quite a bit of homework that was set online.' (Teacher A2).

> 'We had already used the Purple Mash program within school and we used this platform to deliver our distance learning to our pupils. It was something which staff, pupils and parents were already familiar with using, so it made the transition to distance learning run smoothly.' (Teacher B1)

> 'Our Seesaw platform was already utilised in school so therefore the obvious choice to use for distance learning.' (Teacher B2)

> 'See Saw was a platform that was well established with our learners and importantly out parents' (Teach C1)

6.6   Schools made considered decisions about the best way to manage the transition for their own learners and their families:

> 'As a foundation phase team we discussed the best format for our young learners. We agreed on a weekly home learning task sheet. The format was discussed via virtual staff meetings. Discussions took place on consistency throughout the school and examples of good practice were shared.' (Teacher B1)

6.7   For some, despite initial misgivings, the transition was something of a revelation:

> 'I've been quite resistant in the past, but I was amazed how quickly we could all do it, you know, and how quickly we could move. You know,

we have had new laptops and have had new software and, all of a sudden, we're all teaching online'! (Teacher, A3).

6.8 Schools responded rapidly to the demands of distance learning despite the initial shock. Their priority was to find approaches that worked for their pupils and collaboration in school played an important role in developing practice.

Phases of lockdown

6.9 The initial data collection in focus groups took place between November and December 2020 so participants were reflecting on the distance learning in spring 2020 and blended learning as some pupils or groups were required to self-isolate during the autumn term. Later data collection (survey and some focus groups) reflected the experience of the pre-Christmas transition in 2020 and the experience of January - March 2021.

6.10 The experience in the first lockdown was overwhelmingly that the focus was on well-being rather than learning:

'Lockdown #1 = activities to keep the children entertained!

Lockdown #2 = expectation for children to continue learning and make Progress.' (Teacher B2)

6.11 Some teachers reflected on the challenges of socially distanced classroom teaching when the children returned to school in September 2020:

'I was unable to engage with the children in the same way. Helping them with their work or hearing them read, or engaging in conversation with them had to be done from 2m away, whilst wearing a visor.' (Teacher B1)

'My school also introduced a schedule for classes to use the toilets, scheduling time for the cleaner to clean the toilets too. It was difficult to expect my class (Year 3) to follow a strict timetable for going to the bathroom.' (Teacher B1)

6.12 Most children returned to school in September 2020 and were enthusiastic to participate but:

> 'We had a number of pupils who were kept at home during the Autumn Term due to parents' concerns about the virus - these pupils were contacted weekly and engagement in learning was good through Google Classroom.' (Teacher C3)

6.13 By January 2021, there was evidence that schools and pupils had adapted and developed the provision.

> 'I think we've had more time this time to communicate the expectations to students … So, it's been a lot easier to manage the second time, whereas in the first one it was all quite rushed, wasn't it?' (Teacher, A1)

6.14 For some teachers, the priorities changed between the two phases from a focus mainly on wellbeing to a continuity of learning:

> 'Because there is a difference between, I think, the last lockdown, which was very much more based on childcare, if truth be told, really, whereas this lockdown quite rightly, is based much more on trying to keep children's education going, whether they're at home or at school.' (Teacher, A2).

> 'More engaged this lock down and more response from parents and students themselves. They are showing more response to live lessons and asking more questions.' (Teacher C2)

6.15 Some schools reported the effect of pressure to perform in certain ways from the county and Welsh Government at different stages:

> 'Mi ddaeth y pressure o'r top, ar y llywodraeth, lawr ar y Sir, ac mi fu ar i ni deimlo'r pwysau o'r Sir yn dod lawr arnon ni, a deud fod yn rhaid i ni roi shifft arno rŵan, ac mi oedd hynny'n amlwg yn enwedig tua mis Tachwedd [2020]… wnaethon ni cael shifft er mwyn, eto, fatha profi pwynt i'r Llywodraeth, i'r Cyngor, ac i bwy bynnag, ein bod ni yn gweithio'n galed, ac ein bod ni yn gwneud hyn yn 'iawn' drwy gynnig

dau sesiwn byw'r dydd. [Ond] oni yn teimlo … 'ydyn ni'n neud hyn er mwyn y plant?' Achos, yn bersonol, oni'n teimlo fatha bod ni just yn ticio bocsys, ac yn trio plesio nhw [yr awdurdodau].'

'The pressure came from the top, pressure from Welsh Government, and from the Local Authority, and we certainly felt the pressure from the Local Authority come down on us, and they said that we had to shift tings up a gear, and that was particularly noted in November [2020]… there was an additional expectation for us to shift our provision so that we could, to every extent and purpose, prove a point to Welsh Government, to the Local Authority, and to whoever else who was watching, that we were truly working hard, and that we were doing what was 'right', as we were offering two live sessions a day. [But], I did wonder… 'are we doing this for the sake of the children?' Because, personally, I felt we were just ticking boxes to please them [the authorities].' (Teacher A4)

6.16   Over the different periods of lockdown, schools adapted their timetables and approaches based on reflection and on feedback from pupils and parents:

'[Yn ystod y cyfnod clo cychwynnol roedd yr] amserlen wreiddiol yn cael ei gynnal … [ond] wnaethon ni ymateb yn eithaf cyson i adborth rhieni, so, yn y diwedd wnaethon ni rhoi amserlen newydd lle roedden ni'n gosod pynciau craidd ar y dydd Llun, pynciau anghraidd ar y dydd Mercher, ac wedyn roedd pawb yn gwybod, er bod lot o'r tasgau yn cael eu gosod yr un pryd, roedd gan y disgyblion gweddill yr wythnos [neu hyd y diwrnod penodol] i'w cwblhau. Cafodd hynna ei wneud yn seiliedig ar adborth disgyblion a rhieni.'

'[during the initial lockdown the] original timetable was being offered...[but] we responded continuously to parental feedback, so, eventually, we established a new timetable where we set core subjects materials on a Monday, non-core material on a Wednesday, and so, as a result, everybody knew, despite the fact that many tasks were set on the same day, that the students had the rest of the week [or until the

set day] to complete the work. That was undertaken as a result of feedback by both pupils and parents.' (Teacher A5)

6.17 Teachers reflected that the learning offered to pupils over the different periods of lockdown had improved as their own IT skills and understanding of distance learning developed:

'The offer of learning that we were able to give our pupils has vastly improved due to staff training opportunities in the Autumn Term - Staff confidence on IT packages has allowed them to be creative with the live teaching sessions.' (Teacher C2)

'In the first lockdown a lot of our work was worksheets - that has changed considerably.' (Teacher C2)

'More live teaching, live assemblies and wellbeing sessions. It became apparent that the children needed to see their teacher and their own friends as well and show them that they were not alone. Feedback from parent survey showed that the parents needed live teaching from the professional and the feedback shows that the children are engaging more as they can see their teacher and friends live on screen.' (Teacher C2)

6.18 On the whole, teachers were positive about their pupils' experience across the phases of lockdown but one expressed concern:

'Learners have regressed in confidence socially and academically. This was noticed when moved up a class in September but as the lockdowns and self-isolating became more frequent all the academic gains were gradually being lost.' (Teacher C1)

6.19 It is important to note that schools did not have to adapt their practice only once, but on several successive occasions. There were challenges at every stage, adapting to distance learning but also welcoming learners back to a changed school environment. A process of constant adaptation characterized the teachers' experiences.

Choice of online platforms

6.20   Schools approach to the choice of online platforms depended on a number of factors such as the progress they had made in integrating online learning into practice, ease of availability and guidance from counties and consortia. On the whole the data from secondary schools, including all-through schools, suggests that Teams was the preferred choice while there was greater variety in the primary schools:

> 'Between last lockdown [and] this lockdown [we] got it all down on Google classrooms, and we bought into other online packages . . . things like Oxford Owl so that the children can have a reading book every day.' (Teacher A2)

> 'We had hours and hours of training with every programme going. Of course, it turned out that Teams was the one that we were going to be using all the time, although we didn't really know that then, did we?' (Teacher A3)

> '[Darparu gwaith wythnosol] mewn modd deniadol i bawb [drwy Adobe Spark]'

> '[We provided weekly assignments] in a format that was appealing to all [through the use of Adobe Spark]' (Teachers A4)

> 'Reit ar y cychwyn oedd na mwy nag un platfform i gael gyda ni fel ysgol, a mi oedd hynna'n profi yn bach o broblem … Roedden nhw [y disgyblion] wedi arfer gyda Show My Homework [ond rhaid oedd diwygio]'

> 'Right at the very beginning we were using more than one platform as a school, but that proved to be something of a problem… They [the students] were familiar with Show my Homework [but it was decided that we had to amend our provision]' (Teacher A5)

'Our Seesaw platform was already utilised in school so therefore the obvious choice to use for distance learning.' (Teacher B2)

6.21 Schools also made decisions about the most effective channels for communication with families:

'We used our school Twitter page for communication and we typed a home learning plan which was emailed to parents weekly.' (Teacher B2)

6.22 There was a broadly equal combination of live online, asynchronous online, hard copies by post across the sample linked to learner needs and teacher experience. Schools demonstrated some autonomy in choosing platforms appropriate to their school community. In some cases the decisions were the basis of research prior to the pandemic, while in others the decisions were made in response to it.

Flexibility

6.23 The proliferation of online platforms may have been a source of uncertainty as schools made the transition to distance learning but it also gave flexibility to meet pupils' needs. Schools recognised that live lessons were not necessarily appropriate or practical throughout the day or the week:

'So, we've tried to have a really flexible approach right from the get-go, and we've said to parents in this lockdown that we're going to give them until the Sunday, so if they don't manage to get something done on Thursday, they've got till the Sunday in order to get it done and to upload it. And I think using Google classroom this time, as opposed to HWB, has been easier for us … it seems more of a fluid way of getting the work in and actually the parents hand it in and can see it.' (Teacher A2)

6.24 Schools adapted the use of platforms to meet the circumstances of learners for whom access to devices and connectivity was an issue:

'[We told pupils] you can work from the Teams page if you can't be on the call and if you can't be on the Teams page, then you can email me, and I'll send you the work. And then there are people in school who can't do that and so we'll get them paper copies.' (Teacher, A3)

6.25   In some cases it has taken time to exploit the full potential of the technology:

'Rŵan rydyn ni actually'n cynnal live online sessions. Rydyn ni'n ffrydio'n fyw dwywaith y dydd, pob dydd, gyda'r plant. Mae di cymryd amser i ni gael caniatâd pawb [ond y datblygiad yn werth chweil].'

'We now offer live online lessons. We stream live with our pupils twice a day, every day. It has taken us time to ensure the necessary consent from everybody [but the development has been worthwhile].' (Teacher A4)

6.26   All schools reported that they continued to learn and adapt throughout the different phases of lockdown and that sharing good practice within schools was an important element in their development.

IT Support - Training

6.27   There was some variation in the level of training and support available to teachers. ICT learning and teaching leads played a significant role in support training in some schools, as did ICT managers. Staff also engaged with self-directed learning on different platforms and used the expertise of ITE students on placement. They valued the support available to them from specialists in school who offered tailored provision when it was needed:

'We've got an excellent I.T. manager... and he just sort of led the way completely in terms of being really proactive with using Teams. And we've had lots of training on how to use it with lots of drop-in sessions as well, every Tuesday evening, for anybody that's sort of struggling with certain sort of technique.' (Teacher A1)

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6.28   Some schools identified different levels of training at different points in the pandemic:

> 'Very little during lockdown #1 but more support advice and guidance from LA and GwE in Autumn term.' (Teacher B2)

> 'EAS put training on line during the first lockdown.' (Teacher C1)

6.29   In some cases, the volume of training from external sources was overwhelming at first:

> 'We had hours and hours of training with every programme going…although it was too much at once, really.' (Teacher A3)

6.30   In the same school, the approach developed so that one member of staff became the effective link for training on different platforms:

> 'We've received continued training, constantly, from a member of staff who goes in between all the reps – so the Moodle reps, the Microsoft Teams reps, the Go for Schools reps and stuff like that. So anything that's online then we have a rep for the company and then we have a member of staff who is the go-between person and the one to go to.' (Teacher A3)

6.31   In other contexts, training was reported as more minimal:

> 'During an inset day at the start of the 2nd lockdown, we received a short tutorial on the use of Google Classroom, recapping from a training session a couple of years ago.' (Teacher B1)

6.32   In addition, while there was support from the counties, working through the experience was also valuable:

> 'I think that the training was useful. We've got quite a good lead in [the county] named [xx] who's very good at sending us lots of information. So, it's there and readily available. But, yeah, I learnt by doing.' (Teacher A3)

6.33 Teachers in an all through school in a different county commented on the tailored support from the local authority and the sharing of good practice between colleagues in school:

> 'Mae'r awdurdod lleol wedi bod yn wych...o ran darparu hyfforddiant, ac maen nhw dal yn darparu hyfforddiant.'

> 'The local authority have been brilliant…in regard to offering training, and they're continually offering us training throughout.' (Teacher A5)

'Be oni'n gweld yn ddefnyddiol - a fydden i yn dweud fod hyn ar draws yr hyfforddiant oedd y Sir, Erw, y Llywodraeth yn cynnig - oedd bod y cymorth yn cael ei deilwra'

> 'What I found useful – and I would say that this was consistent across the board, be it from the support and training offered by the local authority, ERW, and Welsh government – was that the support offered was always tailored.' (Teacher A5)

'Fydden i'n cael lot o syniadau o siarad â staff. Dim ond ddoe oni'n siarad gydag aelod o staff lle...oedd hi eisiau canu a dysgu can ffeithiol i'r disgyblion. So ma gymaint o staff gwych yn yr ysgol ac mi ydyn ni'n lwcus iawn.'

> 'I would get a load of ideas from speaking with staff. Only yesterday I was speaking with a member of staff who…wanted to sing an educational song to teach her pupils! There are so many amazing members of staff within the school, and we're truly very fortunate to have them.') (Teacher A5)

6.34 Primary schools are necessarily working on a smaller scale but there were differences in approach between the schools in the sample. In some schools the training was part of the engagement with online learning which started before the pandemic while others participated in training in response to the situation. They were able to take advantage of courses, of their contacts with other schools locally, and staff expertise:

'In the first lockdown there were an awful lot of online courses, to do with Google classrooms, Teams, Adobe Spark… and I think we'd all also come to the conclusion having been talking to other schools and going on the training that we were going to use HWB, still, but we were going to move from J2E as the main form of online platform to Google classrooms. We've piloted it and trialled it all in the autumn term. So, we've learnt by our mistakes before we really had to really rely on it. And we're still learning now, but I think we try to go and use the information we've got on the courses, plus support each other and look at what other schools are doing as well, really.' (Teacher A2)

'I had previously received training when we purchased the Purple Mash package a few years ago so did not require further training when we went into lockdown.' (Teacher B1)

6.35   Teachers also sought out training for their own self-identified needs:

'In the first lockdown I did lots of different courses that were running free on Google classroom and all those different ones, and different things that I just took on board myself because I wanted to learn for myself.' (Teacher A2)

6.36   In other contexts, schools relied more on the external training provided by the county:

'Ma na lot o sesiynau hyfforddi wedi bod, a mae'r sir wedi bod yn dda o ran cynnig hyfforddiant...ac mae o di bod yn wych o ran faint o hyfforddiant sydd allan yna.'

'There have been so many training sessions, and the local authority have truly been great in offering that support…and the breadth of training opportunities out there has been superb.' (Teacher A5)

6.37   At the same time it is important to recognise that individual dispositions influence the experience:

'Oni mewn panic yn ystod un sesiwn byw wrth ffrydio, a nes i ddanfon chat... i [hyfforddwr technegol yr awdurdod lleol] a ddaeth hi nôl gydag ateb yn syth. Ma nhw'n gefnogol iawn fel na, a fyswn i'n deud fod nhw'n effeithiol.'

'I was in an utter panic during one live lesson, and so I sent a message… to [the educational technological support officer with the local authority] and she came back to me with the support and the answer to my question immediately. They're ever so supportive like that, and I would say that they're very effective'. (Teacher A4)

'Dwi yn teimlo pan ma nhw yn cynnig hyfforddiant, mae o dros y Sir a ma na gymaint o bobl ar yr hyfforddiant fel dwi ddim yn gofyn cwestiwn. Er bod gen i gymaint o gwestiynau mae o'n rhy overwhelming i mi ofyn cwestiwn rili stupid o flaen 30/40 o bobl .'

'I do feel, when they do offer training opportunities, the fact that the training is offered across the local authority means that there are so many people online that you can't comfortably ask a question. Despite the fact that I often have so many questions, I feel the situation too overwhelming to ask a question which may seem really stupid in front of 30 to 40 people.' (Teacher A4)

6.38   In some schools, training for distance learning was not available:

'No training in regards to distance learning.' (Teacher B2)

6.39   The overall picture shows a variation from an over-supply to minimal training. The evidence suggests that centralised or commercial training is useful to schools but that a key element is training or support that responds to the needs of the school or individual teacher. Schools report that this is effective when developed and delivered by their own staff.

IT Support – Hardware

6.40   All schools reported challenges with pupils' access to hardware at the beginning of the first lockdown. This problem was resolved by one county providing laptops for sixth form pupils, schools providing laptops for some pupils and Welsh Government supplying dongles. As the pandemic progressed, schools noted that appropriate hardware was less of a problem.

> 'The school were really great with providing [equipment] And even with the kids… I think all the kids, or at least a significant number of the kids that needed them, were given laptops as well.' (Teacher A3)

6.41   Schools were aware, however, that in some families siblings were sharing devices and that this influenced the ways in which pupils were able to engage with learning:

> 'We've sort of timetabled the other classes at different times, because obviously there may be siblings in different classes and they may have limited devices.' (Teacher, A2)

> 'But we do get around it. They may say, oh, miss, I need to go because my brother needs to use the laptop, so I'll just say quickly how to do this, and ask them to come back on in 20 minutes. They've adapted well, haven't they, to work with you.' (Teacher A3)

6.42   Staff also needed devices but in some cases there was a delay in their being provided which had an impact on teachers' work:

> 'I think, in school, the one thing that we really would have liked is, actually, staff laptops. I think we've had to use laptops that were designated for the children. However, from two weeks ago we know all have got a staff laptop. We've all had our laptops delivered, which were funded from the Welsh government, and I'm actually using one now and they're great! It would have been really nice to have had those a little bit earlier, in hindsight.' (Teacher, A2)

6.43   In other schools, the provision was in place before lockdown:

'Ni'n eithaf lwcus fod ysgol ni di darparu iPad yr un i bob athro neu athrawes, so fedra i neud rhywbeth ar y laptop, neu dangos gwaith, a chael yr iPad wrth fy ochr hefyd. Ond dwi'n gwybod fod ddim pob ysgol efo hwnna.'

'We're rather fortunate that our school has provided an iPad to every teacher, so, I can be doing something on my laptop, or presenting work, and I can have my iPad by my side as well. But I do know that not every school has that provision.' (Teacher A5)

6.44   It was essential that teachers had appropriate equipment to deliver online learning. For those that did, the transition to distance learning was smoother and easier.

IT Support – Connectivity

6.45   Connectivity presented a problem for many pupils at the beginning of the first lockdown but some of these issues were resolved over time, either by provision of technology or by adapting practice:

'I think because we're recording lessons . . . it's less of an issue now. So, if they do cut out with their Wi-Fi, they know they can download it later. So that certainly has helped pupils who do have poor Wi-Fi or intermittent access. But it's not as many people this time. I'm sure a lot more dongles were given out for the first lockdown.' (Teacher A1)

'So, the connectivity has probably improved from a school point of view. I think some parents still have some issues in the outlying areas from here, but on the whole, and in the school now, it's certainly a lot better than it probably was in March.' (Teacher A2)

'But, you know, in the area we live in, a lot of them don't have very good connectivity. But we've kind of got used to working around it.' (Teacher A3)

'Ma gen i 5 pecyn yr wythnos ar gyfer y plant hynny sydd heb we dderbyniol ddyn nhw ddefnyddio ar gyfer dysgu o bell'

'I have to supply 5 packs a week for those children in my class who don't have a dependable internet connection at home to allow them access to distance learning.' (Teacher A4)

6.46   There is evidence of pupils going to great lengths to get access to their learning:

'Mi oedd na' achos lle oedd brodyr gynnon ni yn gweithio ar hap, a ffeindion ni mas fod yn rhaid iddyn nhw fynd trwy gwpwl o gaeau a lan i dop bryn gyda ffon symudol er mwyn ddyn nhw lawr lwytho 'r cyfan...'

'We had a case where we had brothers who would only engage infrequently, and we later found out that they had had to walk through a couple of fields, to the top of a hill, with a mobile phone just so that they could download the work we were offering…' (Teacher A5)

6.47   Connectivity for rural schools and their pupils was problematic. Schools in urban areas completing the survey reported no connectivity problems. It is clear, however, that their knowledge of their catchment allowed them to anticipate problems and that schools staff and their learners were extremely resourceful in finding solutions. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that further infrastructure support is needed.

Workload

6.48   Although there was some variation between schools, most reported a significant increase in their workload as a result of the transition to distance learning.

'I found it's ballooned. I think during the first lockdown it wasn't so much of an issue because we were setting work, and then you could manage your time better about when you'd mark pieces, but because we're doing everything as live now, I have found that I have to be a bit more strategic.' (Teacher A1)

'Huge Impact! The planning of the activities took a very long time as the tasks needed to be engaging for pupils but easy enough for the parents to understand and work through. As I teach young children, parental support was necessary.' (Teacher B1)

'Workload during the first lockdown was intense and was higher than if we'd been in school. Increased screen time due to Teams meetings and documents to read. I found I was working from 8am to 7pm without taking the proper breaks, and still not having the time to finish work.' (Teacher C1)

'During this spring term [2021] lock down the impact on workload and screen time has been especially great.' (Teacher C3)

6.49   Schools report that they have had to redesign schemes of work for distance learning as a temporary measure:

'All our schoolwork has basically ripped up and restarted again in a very short turnaround in the first lockdown…So, we're doing all the work, but we know we're going to go back to the norm. It's not like we're doing the work on these schemes and work now because we're going to use them in the future.' (Teacher A1)

'Planning was taking longer because I wasn't used to planning for those sorts of lessons… And then … having screen time all day, and live streaming all day and I was absolutely dead by the end of the day.' (Teacher A3)

'Planning took longer due to having to find or adapt work suitable for all abilities. I had to also think about having to word planning in a way which they would understand as they didn't have me physically to 'show' them how to complete tasks.' (Teacher B1)

'Workload was very stressful and difficulty adapting to special needs work.' (Teacher C2)

6.50   Providing feedback to pupils was more time consuming online:

'I found that I'm doing much more than I would normally be doing if we were in school, because I'd only be doing that during the course of the lesson rather than having to actually, you know, open up their work, mark it, comment on it and give it back.' (Teacher A3)

6.51 Some teachers also felt the pressure to maintain an online presence outside school hours, despite an awareness that this was not healthy, knowing that some pupils could only access the materials out of school hours:

'I know I probably shouldn't really be saying this as the unions probably hate it, but from my sixth form, particularly, and the year 11, I'm kind of there all the time.' (Teacher A3)

'I felt it difficult to 'switch off' from school hours, as I was receiving messages from pupils/parents and I was afraid of missing a message from somebody needing my help. Work was handed in from pupils at all sorts of times also, including evenings and weekends. I spent time creating videos to demonstrate and model what I wanted my pupils to achieve, as well as for wellbeing purposes. This took additional time to film and create.' (Teacher B2)

6.52 The introduction of live streaming added a similar pressure in a primary school:

'Ac wedyn...dydyn ni ddim yn cymryd brecs... Ni ar y cyfrifiaduron yma, bron a bod, o 8:30/9:00 y.b. tan yn rhwydd 16:00 yn gwylio pob post sy'n dod trwyddo rhag ofn bo' ni mynd i golli un o'r plant yma yn gofyn am help ac wedyn teimlo, jiw, ni di gadael y plentyn na lawr, neu fod rhiant yn gweld bo' ni heb ymateb yn ddigon cloi.'

'Then…we don't take breaks… We're on these computers from nearly 8;30/9:00 a.m. until at least 16:00 p.m., and we watch every e-mail which comes through with an eagle eye to ensure we don't miss one of the children asking for help, because otherwise we'd feel as if we'd have let that child down, or we'd worry that a parent would notice that we hadn't responded in time.' (Teacher A4)

6.53 Materials required adaptation for the platform and to ensure they were accessible for pupils to engage independently:

> 'Ffeindies i mas cyn y Nadolig fod y plant methu gwneud gwaith ar Publisher, felly roedd pob taflen gwaith oni di creu wedi gorfod cael eu hail wneud ar Word. Oni methu copïo a phastio pethau draw, felly roedd rhaid i fi ddechrau eto am ryw reswm. Wedyn ma rhaid ti gwahaniaethu'r daflen tair gwaith, neu pedair gwaith... ac oni just yn gweld fod rhaid creu gymaint o daflenni newydd a gwaith newydd. Dwi di bod yn dysgu ers 5 mlynedd, ac mi oedd pob dim gen i ar Publisher, felly mi oedd yn rhaid i mi newid pob dim.'

> 'I found out before Christmas that the children couldn't do their work on Publisher, so every worksheet that I'd created had to be re-done on Word. I couldn't copy and paste things across for some reason, so I had to begin from the beginning. Then, on top of that, you have to differentiate the worksheets three or four times… and I just saw how much work I had to do to create these new worksheets, in addition to creating new work. I've been a teacher for 5 years, and everything I had was on Publisher, so it was a case of changing everything.' (Teacher A4)

6.54 There was additional workload for those teachers who needed to provide materials bilingually for parents of children in Welsh medium schools who did not themselves speak Welsh:

> 'Yna ma na rhai sydd eisiau pob dim yn Saesneg a dim yn y Gymraeg. Ma rhai eisiau pacs achos does ganddyn nhw ddim Internet, so, da ni'n neud triple neu quadruple y gwaith fyddan ni'n neud gan amlaf yn yr ysgol bob dydd'.

> 'Some want their work all in English, instead of Welsh. Others want packs because they don't have Internet. So, we end up doing triple, if not quadruple the work we would usually be doing in school every day.' (Teacher A4)

6.55   Differentiation of work needed to be more explicit in writing than it would have been in class:

> 'Rydyn ni'n gweithredu pedair neu pum tasg, rili, o fewn i bob gwers... Rydyn ni'n gorfod gwneud gwaith gwahaniaethol ta beth ar gyfer ein holl blant, ac wedyn ni'n gwahaniaethu ar gyfer y rhieni achos mae'n rhaid i ni addysgu'r rhieni i addysgu'u plant; felly ma' rhaid cael popeth yn ddwyieithog.'

> 'We were pretty much implementing four or five tasks within every lesson… We have to offer work which is differentiated for all our pupils, but we also have to differentiate for the parents, because, essentially, we have to teach the parents to teach their children, and so we need to ensure that everything is bilingual for them.' (Teacher A4)

6.56   One teacher had the opportunity to compare the experience of distance learning in Wales with experience in Finland:

> 'I worked abroad (in Finland) during the first lockdown, until July 2020. During school closures in Finland, workload was slightly greater than usual because, when writing the activity plans for home learning, it took time to explain the tasks for the children at home to complete, as well as carry out the tasks in school for the key worker children. Since returning to the UK, from September to December when school was open, I found the workload the same as usual. However, I found teaching a lot more stressful due to the in-class restrictions, needing to clean equipment constantly, not being able to do active or practical activities, ensuring children were remaining seated.' (Teacher B1)

6.57   Some teachers saw the workload as simply an extension of what they would normally do:

> 'Dydy hwn ddim yn swydd hawdd mewn amseroedd arferol. Ma' hwn yn swydd lle chi'n derbyn chi mewn yn gynnar ac yn gadael yn hwyr.'

> 'This isn't an easy job during the best of times. It's a job where you just have to accept that you'll be in early and leaving late.' (Teacher A5)

> 'Being available at any time of day has been fine, as a parent may need you at 20:00, and having that access to you has been important because those issues don't arise during the day between 9 and 15:30,and they simply need you when they need you. And, obviously for those most vulnerable pupils and families, they need more support now than ever.' (Teacher A5)

6.58 In the context of different roles, one respondent noted a change in workload:

> 'Reduced workload as a class teacher as plans were shared across departments. Increased workload as a Headteacher – risk assessments, plans, preparation for critical worker children, organisation etc.' (Teacher B2)

6.59 The impact on teachers' workload was significant in all sectors. The level and nature of the increase varied according to the phase of lockdown and the individual's role in school. It is likely that the workload will continue to be higher than normal while there are COVID-19 protocols in place in schools. The frustration for teachers was the re-planning of work as a temporary measure, in comparison say to planning for Curriculum for Wales. Teachers consistently made themselves available to support their pupils.

Staff wellbeing

6.60 The first lockdown was described variously as '*big jump for pupils'* (Teacher A1), '*sioc massive*' (Teacher A4) and one teacher reported that they were '*terrified'* (Teacher A3). Bearing in mind the general disruption, these comments and the increased workload reported in 3.5.4, the teachers in the focus groups reflected on the impact of distance learning on their wellbeing.

6.61 An important element was the support and solidarity of the school staff and Teams meetings played a part in sustaining this contact:

> 'During the first lockdown . . . we started Teams meetings as a staff, where everybody logged in and we met on a Wednesday . . . and that was more for our mental well-being. Because some of us were in the

hub, and some of us couldn't go into the hub, so it was just quite nice to touch base with each other, really.' (Teacher, A2).

6.62   There were other attempts to replicate the typical informal communication between colleagues in school:

'A ma' na... flyer, come poster, come newyddlen...yn rhannu arfer da, a ma' athrawon yn cael dweud y pethau hynny sydd wedi gweithio'n dda...a ma' hynny'n cael ei rhannu ymysg staff.'

'There's a flyer-cum-poster-cum-newsletter … sharing good practice and the teachers can say what has worked well and that is shared among the staff.') (Teacher A5)

6.63   In some contexts, however, staff felt isolated and lacking in support:

[Ond] mae o'n bwysig, ond does neb yn gofyn i ni fel staff sut mae'n lles a'n iechyd ni. Ac achos dydyn ni ddim yn gweld ein gilydd...dyw e [y sgyrsiau anffurfiol] ddim yn digwydd.

'But it's important but no one asks about us as a staff, how is our health and wellbeing. And because we don't see each other, the informal conversations don't happen.') (Teacher A4)

6.64   Teachers identified the differences between the different phases of lockdown and the location of the hub in their own school:

'And the hub changing to being in our school made a difference as well. It's nice to be with your own teams, as well, and you can bounce off each other. For our mental health… it's been beneficial as well. Because you're so used to seeing each other all the time, to then suddenly get to March last year and only see each other a handful of times over the summer, it was pretty tough going, really.' (Teachers A2)

6.65   There were particular challenges for teachers starting a new post, where the prospect of not meeting colleagues during the pandemic, added to the challenge:

'I'd certainly say that for myself, and I'm new to the school since January, so initially the thought of having to teach all three humanities subjects, the history, geography and RE, on top of not being able to meet colleagues meant a very heavy workload for the first couple of weeks.' (Teacher A3)

6.66 Some teachers commented on the importance of self-discipline in avoiding over-work.

'I've had forced myself to do stuff. If I've got a break, I'll just get the dog and say, come on, and we'll just march up the road and back because otherwise you're just sat in front of the screen and if you don't get away from it makes you feel ill, doesn't it?' (Teacher A3)

'We need to look after ourselves a bit more, especially with work life balance. I certainly now am stricter with saying, right, I'm not working past this time. Because having that screen time is not good. It's not good for my eyesight, and it's not good for my health.' (Teacher A1)

6.67 Teachers are well aware of the need to maintain a healthy work-life balance but this was compromised by the demands of the situation. An important aspect of teachers' wellbeing is the support of their colleagues: departments, teams or the whole school. The loss of this daily contact was a challenge but in most cases, a combination of whole school strategies and self-discipline was a partial solution.

Supporting students

6.68 Throughout the discussions, the teachers' main focus was to explain the ways in which they had endeavoured to support students as effectively in their distance learning as they would in the classroom. It was noted in paragraph 3.5.2.1 that schools valued the flexibility of different online platforms. This is further reflected in the ways that schools used the technology and other strategies to provide the most appropriate work for learners.

Flexibility in response to pupils' needs

6.69   One school reported a change of approach during the different phases of lockdown:

> 'I think the initial lockdown was … I don't know how to put it really, but a bit more softly, softly approaches with looking after yourselves, and keeping yourselves safe. We were having regular well-being checks just to see how everybody is. And then I feel, personally, that the more skilled we've all become with what we're doing, and the better we get, the higher the expectations.' (Teacher A1)

> 'Because there is a difference between, I think, the last lockdown, which was very much more based on childcare . . . whereas this lockdown quite rightly, is based much more on trying to keep children's education going, whether they're at home or at school.' (Teacher A2)

6.70   Teachers have continually adapted their practice to ensure that pupils' get the maximum variety, support and feedback from their lessons:

> 'So, say, for example, you were doing an extract question, you'd done the modelling and preparation and said, right, here's your fifteen, twenty minutes to write that, and hand it in to me tomorrow to mark. You wouldn't get very many of them handing it in. So, I've tried to adapt to that, and I've now given over the last five minutes to a lot of lessons, where there is a piece I want to assess, and I've said, right, I'm giving you five minutes now to get your camera out and to take a photo of this and to upload it.' (Teacher A1)

> 'I think we've tried to upscale it without a shadow of a doubt and include a lot more variety of things and we've specifically brought in as well - things like Oxford Owl so that the children can have a reading book every day.' (Teacher A2)

'If I felt like, and kids especially like to be running about, how frustrated must they be and how grotty must they feel? So, I started to do things like, if it was a nice day, I would ask them to go outside, to count the birds, and then we'd teach pie charts based on the bird count that they had done. I'd get them out whenever we could. And I just felt that they needed that. And I think most people have started to do that with kids, far as I'm aware, just to break it up a bit.' (Teacher A3)

'2 x 15 minute live streams per week (introduced in late February 2021), mostly for well-being purposes. We play games, read stories, have quizzes during our streams. If the children have a difficult task or concept to understand that week, we go through that in our live stream.' (Teacher B1)

6.71 The recording of lessons and setting of independent tasks improved accessibility for pupils and allowed schools to accommodate family circumstances:

'I think because we're recording lessons, recording live lessons, it's less of an issue now. So, if they do cut out with their Wi-Fi, they know they can download it later.' (Teacher A1)

'So, we've tried to have a really flexible approach right from the get-go, and we've said to parents in this lockdown that we're going to give them until the Sunday, so if they don't manage to get something done on Thursday, they've got till the Sunday in order to get it done and to upload it. And I would say that the majority of parents are able to do that.' (Teacher A2)

'And I think since we've been recording quite a few of our lessons, or rather pretty much all of our lessons, and that gives parents that flexibility to actually re watch things and see things rather than us being live and ensuring that everybody has got to be there at nine o'clock. And I know that does and can work.' (Teacher A2)

6.72   Some schools recognised that some families were struggling to complete the work or to maintain the children's focus and adapted their practice in response:

> 'And what we what we're going to do now is, after talking to the children last week and hearing they're all having too much screen time. So, what we've what we've come up with is we're going to do a family Friday. So, what we've said to the parents is that Friday is to make sure that all that activities from the week are completed and handed in on Google classrooms and then, come this Friday, we will set you a family challenge, if you like.' (Teacher, A2)

> 'The model we're using is evolving from week to week as we're learning perhaps what needs to work and how we can support parents too.' (Teacher A2)

6.73   Schools also needed to be flexible in response to practical limitations and student preference:

> 'So, we always have options. You know, you can work from the Teams page if you can't be on the call and if you can't be on the Teams page, then you can email me, and I'll send you the work. And then there are people in school who can't do that and so we'll get them paper copies.' (Teacher A3)

> 'I think there's only one pupil that I know that's asked for a hard copy of the work, and that's more for personal preference rather than not having a device that will access. They prefer to do it by hand.' (Teacher A1)

6.74   When necessary and in response to pupil feedback, schools provided lower tech options for some activities:

> 'I didn't even think at all about having no data and no Internet because in this modern day and age you just didn't think about it. So, we just we did all YouTube videos or whatever and then another member of staff would upload a picture as a no data work out. So, the children could

just download that and just read the picture, more or less, instead of going on YouTube. And that is something which we did then for everything, you know.' (Teachers A3)

6.75 Schools made judgements about the choice of resources and how they were used, ensuring that pupils had opportunities to contact their own teachers as well as use video content:

'I've found I've gone for a little bit of a mixture. Whereas I'll always log on, and I always do a livestream and say hi and have a little chat with them as I do feel that they like that … but then, you know, there are millions of maths videos online and so we don't need to make any as there's so many.' (Teacher A3)

6.76 While there was a variety of practice in the difference schools, many found that regular, although not constant contact was the most effective.

'And I think the variety helps as well. At the start I insisted on a full timetable of just live streaming. And I got to first Friday and was absolutely knackered. And I've noticed more by now that the kids like the variety of activities. So, I'll see them on Monday, and I'll do a livestream. Then I might see them again on Wednesday and I'll just set them independent work and I'll make myself available in the forum in the Team. And I think the kids like the variety. It's not so onerous or heavy on me or them. I think they quite like the livestream lessons, but not if it's done all the time.' (Teacher A3)

'Rydyn ni'n ffrydio'n fyw dwywaith y dydd pob dydd gyda'r plant. Rydyn ni'n dangos ein hwynebau ni, ac mae'r plant yn clywed ni'n siarad trwy bethau.'

'We are streaming live twice a day, every day with the children. We stream live, and we make sure the children can see our faces and hear us talk them through things.' (Teacher A4)

6.77 In some schools, the response was to revise the timetable completely to facilitate online engagement:

'Wnaethon ni ymateb yn eithaf cyson i adborth rhieni so yn y diwedd wnaethon ni rhoi amserlen newydd lle roedden ni'n gosod pynciau craidd ar y dydd Llun, pynciau anghraidd ar y dydd Mercher, ac wedyn roedd pawb yn gwybod, er bod lot o'r tasgau yn cael eu gosod yr un pryd, roedd gan y disgyblion gweddill yr wythnos i'w cwblhau. Cafodd hynna ei wneud yn seiliedig ar adborth disgyblion a rhieni.'

'We responded continuously to parental feedback, so, eventually, we established a new timetable where we set core subjects materials on a Monday, non-core material on a Wednesday, and so, as a result, everybody knew, despite the fact that many tasks were set on the same day, that the students had the rest of the week [or until the set day] to complete the work. That was undertaken as a result of feedback by both pupils and parents.' (Teacher A5)

6.78 Schools recognised that teaching online was very different from classroom-based teaching with its own limitations and potential:

'Ma dysgu byw yn peth arbennig, a dwi'n rhagweld fydd na elfen ar dysgu byw yn parhau gyda ni am cyfnodau...adolygu neu dal i fyny wrth dod i fyny i cyfnod arholi...yn enwedig gyda'r cyfle i recordio pethau a cael y plant i ail edrych ar rhywbeth. Dwi yn gweld mae'r cam fwyaf...ydy'r dysgu byw.'

'Live online teaching is a wonderful thing, and I foresee that there will be an element of live learning continuing for periods… of revision, or for recapping during the run up to examinations…especially since we now have the opportunity to record our sessions, and allow the pupils to re-watch them. The biggest step forward we've taken as part of our development…is the adoption of live online learning.' (Teacher A5)

6.79 Schools responded quickly and flexibly to feedback from pupils and parents, adapting their practice to meet the needs of their community. They acted autonomously based on knowledge of their own pupils and their needs.

Responses show that schools continuously evaluated their practice and included a variety of approaches to enable pupils to engage in their learning.

Vulnerable students

6.80   The experience of distance learning has caused schools to broaden the definition of vulnerability because some children have been rendered vulnerable by the situation, especially as it continued:

> 'We're asking children to come in a little bit more now purely because of a welfare point of view. Some of the some of the children key stage two are, we found, particularly this time compared to the last time are struggling, with their well-being and their mental well-being an awful lot more this time than they were last time.' (Teacher A2)

> 'A definite shift in those needing support.' (Teacher A5)

> 'What we've established is that our pupils who are anxious in school are doing really well at home but the ones which are anxious about not being in school are truly struggling at the moment. Our balance is constantly tipping towards the greater support which is needed.' (Teacher A5)

6.81   There were also concerns about the ways in pupils were engaging with their work and the possible impact on their wellbeing:

> 'And I will get emails from students at like two o'clock in the morning. Obviously, I don't pick them up until the following morning, but the thought that they're up doing my work for me at that time… I don't feel comfortable with that. They shouldn't be doing that, you know. So, it's a little bit uncomfortable when you imagine students sat in their bedrooms, you know, at midnight, trying to do some business studies. It just doesn't feel right. I feel, we're too accessible. I suppose that they [the students] are too accessible as well. They've got no break from their home to their school.' (Teacher A1)

6.82   Schools were also able to identify the needs in specific groups, either by age or gender:

> 'I think they need that reassurance because I think the conscientious ones are getting overwhelmed because they've got so much to do, and they think everything has to be perfect and think - I'm not going to hand it in unless it's perfect. So, I think that's helped to break down the barrier with some of them and reassure them that it's OK not to be perfect at this stage in year 11.' (Teacher A1)

> 'It goes against the grain for the children to have not been coming in. The term vulnerable is quite a broad term, I think, anyway, and I think some of those children are quite vulnerable in that their mental health has suffered as a result of lockdown…in particular within our year five and six.' (Teacher A2)

> 'A lot more boys are needing a bit more support at the moment at home.' (Teacher A5)

6.83   In secondary schools, the needs of vulnerable pupils were addressed by the pastoral teams:

> 'We've got a great pastoral team that are the link with those sorts of things [e.g. issues regarding connectivity and access to work].' (Teacher A3)

6.84   In primary schools, regular phone calls were an important element in monitoring children's wellbeing but when live streaming became a regular element of practice teachers were reassured by seeing the children regularly:

> 'Cysylltu a pob disgybl dros y ffôn yn wythnosol yn y cychwyn.'

> 'We contacted every pupil on a weekly basis over the phone at the beginning.' (Teacher A4)

6.85   Schools used their knowledge of their pupils and monitored engagement to support known vulnerable learners. In addition, most re-evaluated their

criteria for identifying those who were rendered vulnerable by the pandemic and developed support as appropriate. Some learners thrived on the security of working at home and receiving detailed support and feedback from their teachers.

Pupil engagement online

6.86 Teachers responding to the survey in early 2021, noted differences in the levels of engagement in the different lockdowns. In the period March-July 2020:

> 'The majority of my learners engaged effectively by sharing their wo rk weekly on our class blog.' (Teacher B1)

> 'I roughly had about half of my class engaging during the first lockdown. I noticed that it was the same children weekly which I was not hearing from. These names were reported weekly to my Headteacher.' (Teacher B1)

> 'Very little engagement - less than 25%.' (Teacher B2)

6.87 A significant factor was the resources available to parents to help their children:

> 'Our engagement was sporadic. Many of our parents said that the children would not sit and let them help them complete the work. Many parents said that they didn't have the IT resources to support learning on line. Many parents requested paper packs and then did not collect them.' (Teacher C3)

> 'Depending on what IT skills the children's parents had a huge impact on engagement. Lots of the children said that they hadn't completed much of the home learning during this time. At the beginning of March live lessons were not essential and I think the students became disengaged. If they didn't understand something they were unable to ask questions and have their questions answered.' (Teacher C2)

6.88   Some secondary schools have reported different patterns of engagement in different year groups:

> 'I teach in years 9-13 and I find the engagement is stronger higher up the school. So, I would very rarely have a sixth former lose a lesson, whereas in year nine I had 16 out of 26. I also find that lower down the school, they're happy to write on the chat on Teams. So, everyone can ask a question, share their work in front of each other, but as we move up the school, I find that with the A level students, and GCSE, they email me. They don't want to share their thoughts. They don't want to share their questions that they want to ask me, and they tend to email me them instead of using Teams.' (Teacher A1)

> 'All of my teaching timetable consists mainly years 10 through to 13, and it's all very much assignment based as well. So, I'm finding that I'm constantly got my email open and I've got my teams chat open and I've got people coming from here, there and everywhere. Can you check this? Is this okay? Have I done this right?... Whereas you would normally be in a classroom and they would ask you face to face, now it's all done online. And it takes a lot longer to respond to an email.' (Teacher A1)

> 'I found they would certainly turn up to lessons, and they were mostly there for the lessons, but there was certainly a reluctance from some to hand in work that they'd completed…So, I've tried to adapt to that, and I've now given over the last five minutes to a lot of lessons, where there is a piece I want to assess, and I've said, right, I'm giving you five minutes now to get your camera out and to take a photo of this and to upload it.' (Teacher A1)

6.89   In some schools, certain groups were more affected than others by periods of quarantine during autumn 2020:

> 'With year 11, for example, they're fantastic because they were hit the hardest, for us, with quarantines, and we've had a lot of people voice

from them, and some of them are getting so disheartened. They were fed up. They hated being at home when everybody else was at school. And so, they're engaging really well because they know it matters and they want to achieve well.' (Teacher A1)

6.90 Some schools reported that for some learners and against their expectations, online learning brought advantages:

'Whilst a lot of kids get overshadowed in class, don't they, and they don't want to ask, or there's too much other stuff going on, whereas they can contact me directly, any time, either in the chat of the meeting or they can e-mail me while everyone's doing their work. And it is, you know, for a lot of kids it has made the teaching more accessible.' (Teacher A3)

'I'm stunned by this - there's just a little handful of kids that have absolutely flourished, you know, with the independent learning. Once they're away from distractions in school they've just been absolutely flying, you know. They're learning everything that I'm teaching them and then going off and doing their own stuff because they're at home.' (Teacher A3)

6.91 Levels of pupil engagement in some primary schools, showed schools what was effective for their learners:

'And the children, because we piloted it in September onwards, the children enjoyed it, and it was amazing how quickly they picked up the skills of using iPads to upload work and to find documents, to work in it, to bring things. Once they got their teeth into it, they sort of led the way and showed us that we'd made the right decision.' (Teacher A2)

6.92 There were challenges with pupils who did not engage but schools have worked with them and their families to encourage them:

'I think there were more kids at the beginning that didn't do it. And there was one boy that was even playing Warcraft one time and we could hear him! But we did have people in school, you know, who contacted

those kids' parents and…but they seem to have come back into the fold, really. So, there were a few kids at the beginning who did not do any work. They would just pretend they were there. But they seem to be taking part as they weren't before.' (Teacher A3)

6.93   In some schools, there was some frustration at the lack of response:

'Roedd y plant yn teimlo felse bo gormod i wneud...ma nhw di cyfaddef, "na Miss, dydyn ni ddim yn mynd ar Adobe Spark," ond pob dydd dwi'n ychwanegu tasgau newydd ar Adobe Spark.'

'The children felt that there was too much to do…and they've confessed, "no miss, we aren't going on Adobe Spark," and yet I keep on creating new tasks and adding them to Adobe Spark.' (Teacher A4)

'Yn ogystal, dwi'n defnyddio gwefannau ac yn y blaen a dwi'n teimlo fod hwna'n wastraff achos dydy'r plant ddim yn ymateb i bopeth.'

'Additionally, I use websites and so on, but I do feel that it's a waste of time because the children don't interact and respond to everything I offer.' (Teacher A4)

6.94   There was evidence in some contexts that pupil engagement declined over time, either during the course of a week or over the period of lockdown.

'Dwi'n teimlo ar ddechrau'r wythnos – ar y dydd Llun a'r dydd Mawrth – mae'r canran yn uchel iawn o rhan y plant sy'n ffrydio'n fyw, ond erbyn y dydd Iau a dydd Gwener [mae e'n is]... Ma na deimlad os wna i e dydd Llun, dydd Mawrth a dydd Mercher yna ma dydd Iau a dydd Gwener [I ymlacio]...ma nhw wedi gorffen y tasgau. Dwi'n rhoi y tasgau lan ar y dydd Llun ac efallai fydd tri o'r bechgyn wedi cwblhau dwy dasg cyn bo ni'n ffrydio'n fyw i esbonio nhw.'

'I feel, at the beginning of the week – on the Monday and the Tuesday – that the percentage of children who live stream is rather high, but, by the Thursday and the Friday [it's much less]… There's a feeling if they can complete the work on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday then

they've got Thursday and Friday [to relax]… as they've finished the tasks. So, I put the tasks up on a Monday, and maybe three or so of the boys will have finished the task before we get a chance to live stream and explain the task to them.' (Teacher A4)

'Mae'r ymateb wrth y disgyblion yn cwympo'n ddyddiol… [ma] nhw'n colli'r trefn, a ma angen y strwythur arnyn nhw...[mae nhw] yn mynd yn eithaf disengaged gyda be sy'n digwydd, a ma na ddiffyg cymhelliant. Er bo nhw efallai yn y gwersi dydyn nhw ddim wedi ymrwymo cystal a be oedden nhw ar y cychwyn. Ma nhw eisiau fod nol yn yr ysgol.'

'The responses from the students decrease daily… they miss the routine, and they need that structure to thrive… They're becoming rather disengaged with what's happening, and there's a lack of incentive, and despite them being in the lessons, they simply aren't engaged or committed to the same degree they were at the beginning. They want to be back in school.' (Teacher A4)

6.95   Other teachers noted, however, that over time, some pupils realized that they missed school and wanted to engage:

'But. . . as time has gone on, children have realised and learnt, you know, that they do want an education at the end of the day, and they don't want to be left out, and they know it's affecting their future and they've become a lot more engaged.' (Teacher A3)

6.96   Across the sample of schools, pupils who were not engaging were followed up, usually with a phone call. By the second lockdown, there was a much higher level of engagement, although there were caveats:

'I have about 80% who keep in touch but few of them carry out 'effective' work.' (Teacher B1)

'I am very pleased with the effort, quality and quantity of work that my children are doing during this lockdown. However, it is difficult to know how much is their own work, and how much is input from parents. (Teacher B1)

'75%+ engagement in all classes during the latest lockdown. Hardest to engage = Year 6.' (Teacher B2)

'After Christmas, I felt I had a better feel for online learning… I was able to use my own planning format, which over the weeks, was adopted by all staff in the school. Feedback from parents was positive. During this lockdown, I had more children engaging with the tasks than during the first lockdown.' (Teacher B1)

6.97   Teachers identified the channels for providing feedback as an element in engagement:

'For those who are submitting work, I think it [Google classroom] has been very positive. I think it has driven some to continue to stay focused.' (Teacher B1)

'Our school policy is to provide feedback via commenting privately on the children's work once it has been submitted. This is mostly positive feedback, giving praise for their efforts and the things they have done well… For some children, this approach is effective as some children read our comments and leave comments in reply, some children make the corrections which we ask of them. However, many children do not reply to our comments so we cannot tell if they have read our feedback or not.' (Teacher B1)

'Children uploaded written work to Purple Mash which I commented on and gave feedback. Using Purple Mash allows you to comment on online work, which I did when it was submitted. I felt it was effective as I had many oy my pupils replying to my comments.' (Teacher B1)

6.98   A number of schools emphasized the importance of brining the school or classes together online:

'Daily assemblies at 9.30am – Google Meet. On average 40 pupils join us for this daily with siblings attending together.' (Teacher C2)

> 'Well-being sessions with all classes - Monday and Friday. Monday session is about setting the scene for the weeks learning and Friday session is a 'plenary' of the weeks' sessions.' (Teacher C3)

6.99   There was a mixed picture of pupil engagement across the schools and over time, with many factors influencing the extent to which individual pupils engaged. It is difficult to draw general conclusions but some points do emerge. It seems that pupils were able to engage with distance learning effectively if they had already been introduced to the platforms and activities before lockdown and when they themselves understood its importance. In primary schools, engagement was to a large extent dependent on parents' capacity to support their children, e.g. time, equipment, connectivity. In later lockdowns, experience varied as some learners became more comfortable with distance learning while others wearied of it. For some learners, teachers felt the independence offered by distance learning, accelerated their progress.

Pupil engagement across phases and subjects

6.100   The focus groups included teachers of all phases and a variety of subjects. They had difference experiences of and perspectives on their provision for and the engagement of pupils. One secondary school highlighted that pupils had missed the experience of a supported transition into the next phase of their education:

> 'The older ones, I think, are enjoying the independent learning, but the younger ones still need support. And that comes down to the last year because our year eight never got to finish year seven. So even when we were in school, you could see the difference in them. They never got the transition. And the Year 7, obviously, never got that transition period to high school. And even to an extent with our Year 10 who never got a transition period really into GCSE.' (Teacher A3)

6.101 For practical subjects in secondary schools, access to specialist equipment was as great a barrier to engagement as access to technology and connectivity:

> 'And I know, for instance, in my department, with photography, some devices have gone home. The photography department, for those photography students, has offered equipment for them to use.' (Teacher A1)

> 'Before Christmas I said to them, right, take loads of resources, and take the sketchbooks just in case we go into a firebreak after Christmas, which proved well, because, obviously, we went into a lockdown, but A level and GCSE had all had like little painting packs, and they'd been able to take whatever they thought they needed from the classroom to continue their projects.' (Teacher A1)

6.102 These strategies were not available, however, to pupils studying textiles who needed to use sewing machine and to pupils studying design technology who needed access to workshops. Teachers were concerned that the lack of opportunity to engage with this aspect of the subject would have a longer term impact in future participation in the subject:

> 'Because the other knock-on effect is, because we're talking about kind of options evenings and GCSE options, and A level options, etc, because there's been a long time since they've been able to do practical DT, construction, engineering type work, we're anticipating that there's going be a bit of a knock-on effect on pupil numbers taking the option choices because they haven't had a real flavour . . .they've missed out on what, for some of them, would have been the selling point, which was the practical aspect.' (Teacher A1)

6.103 Teachers of PE had to be creative in their planning of distance learning tasks:

> 'So, we looked at monitoring heart rate and we've created a whole module now around heart rates and we have them take their heart

rates during exercising. So that's one thing which we had to get round. Going forward then, we see iPad and video of them exercising themselves and monitoring it becoming more of a focus, so that teachers will be able to give feedback to the students.' (Teacher A3)

'It's still trial and error at the moment with what we're going to do. We're just aware that it is the way forward. And I know, I did a lot within university as well with using iPads . . and it is definitely a way of engaging children a lot more. And we're preparing them for stuff like a snow day. We've laughed and joked that there is no such thing as snow day anymore, so, if children go out and have a snowball fight, they record themselves. We can then look at their throwing technique. So, it can be as silly as that.' (Teacher A3)

6.104   There were obvious challenges with pupils in the Foundation Phase but teachers found ways of engaging them and their parents:

'In the foundation phase, a lot of the activities that parents are obviously handing in and uploading is picture evidence that gives a little snapshot and they say that they've found this really interesting or that they didn't want to start reading today, but once they got involved, then they were really engaged. So, I'm getting that daily kind of contact.' (Teacher A2)

6.105   The limitation with this age group is the degree of parental involvement in the work but there are different perspectives on this:

'Because, obviously, it is that the parents have to engage with them as well. So, you have known what child is led and what is kind of parent input. So that's been really helpful to have with the photograph evidence as well as the work evidence and the little dialogue as well.' (Teacher A2)

'Achos dwi'n teimlo weithiau fel petai rhai rhieni yn cymryd drosodd ar y gwaith, a dwi'n gallu dweud fod y plentyn heb cwblhau'r gwaith yna ar ben ei hun, a fod nhw di derbyn gormod o help... Wedyn dwi'n gweld

e'n anodd gwahaniaethu oherwydd help y rhieni. Mae modd clywed rhieni mewn gwersi byw yn rhoi atebion i'r plant.'

'I do feel that the parents sometimes take over on the work, and I can say that the child hasn't completed the work by themselves, and that they've received too much help… As a result I find it difficult to differentiate accordingly because of the parents' help. You can even hear some parents telling their child the answer to a question during live lessons.' (Teacher A4)

6.106   Subject departments and primary teams have had a degree of autonomy in designing learning aimed at specialist outcomes. While there has been obvious creativity, there is no substitute for pupils' access to the specialist resources and equipment available to them in secondary school or the interaction with peers and increasing independence of the Foundation Phase. It is possible that learners will require additional support in addressing these lost opportunities.

Working with parents

6.107   Distance learning necessitated that parents were more directly involved with their children's learning than ever before. For older secondary pupils, that might simply have meant being at home with the pupil while they did their school work. The parents of primary pupils, however, were necessarily more directly involved. Schools' effective communication with parents was more important than ever.

'Parents are being very supportive in their child's learning during the current lockdown.' (Teacher B1)

6.108   Schools recognised the many challenges that parents might face in supporting their children and tried to anticipate these by offering support:

'And we've recorded little 'how to videos' to try and make it as easy for parents to use and support the children at home much as possible. Because we can't judge what every home is like.' (Teacher A2)

'But what we've also started doing this time is that we've given the parents a weekly overview with very brief timetables so that they can see the format of what's coming up and what's expected.' (Teacher A2)

6.109 As with other aspects of distance learning, schools noted a change of attitude in the different phases of lockdown.

'Yn y clo cyntaf, 'sai'n credu oedd gymaint o bwyslais [ar waith], er fod gynon ni fe ysgol pwyslais ar wneud gwaith... Roedd y tywydd yn ffein ac oedd lot o bobl yn teimlo fod e'n bwysicach i fynd allan a neud pethau ar y cyd, a gwneud bana bread a phopeth oedd pawb yn gneud. Erbyn y cyfnod clo yna mae gymaint o amser wedi mynd heibio fel fod na elfen o banic gyda rhai rhieni lle ma nhw'n sylweddoli nad oedd yr output ddim cystal llynedd oherwydd doedden nhw ddim yn meddwl fyddai'r cyfnod hyn mor hir a be mae e wedi bod. Felly erbyn hyn ma lot o rhieni yn cysylltu yn eisiau mwy o gefnogaeth achos fod yr elfen yna o banic.'

'During the first lockdown I don't think there was such a focus [on work], despite the fact that we placed an emphasis on completing the work set as a school… The weather was fine and many people felt it was more beneficial to be outside, and doing things together as a family, and making banana breads and everything else everybody seemed to be doing. But, by this current lockdown [the third Welsh lockdown] so much time has gone by, and there's a sense of panic with some parents as they've suddenly noticed that their children's output hasn't been of such a high quality as it usually would have been because they underestimated the length of the lockdown, and the commitment of their children during the period. So, now we have a load of parents contacting us to request more support because that element of panic has finally set in.' (Teacher A5)

6.110 In some schools there was an emphasis on keeping channels of communication with parents as open as possible:

> 'And we've also we phoned all of our families as well, and we've spoken to all our families and we're giving families a chance to call us back if need be too. So, we as teachers can then contact parents and we can also contact parents on a system called Class Dojo. Whereby, if we can't see certain things happening, we can contact parents. I think the thing has been keeping the dialogue open between us and home. That's been really important.' (Teacher A2)

6.111 In some contexts, however, the communication added to the pressure on staff:

> 'Ma rheini wedi cymryd mwy o rôl yn addysg eu plant – sydd yn peth da – ond ar y llaw arall ni di cael lot mwy o e-byst gan rhieni yn gofyn am fwy o waith, ac ati, a dwi'n gweld fod gofynion nhw wedi mynd yn eithaf extreme...ni'n derbyn hynny bob dydd fel athrawon, a da ni'n mynd i'r gwaith ac yn gadael y gwaith and that's life. Ond ma hwn just yn extreme hollol gwahanol. A mae'r pressure o rhieni yn y cefndir yn waeth. Dwi di rhai rhieni wedi gwersi ... yn fideo callio fi'n syth ... yn commentio ar y wers a eisiau rhoi cyngor i mi. So ma pethau bach fel na yn rhoi lot mwy o straen a lot mwy o stress. Oni byth eisiau teimlo fel hyn, ond dwi'n teimlo bo fi'n paratoi'r tasgau er mwyn cadw'r rhieni'n hapus. Dwi'n nabod anghenion pob un o'r plant yn fy nosbarth, ond dwi'n teimlo fod rhaid i fi newid y gwaith er mwyn siwtio'r rheini.'

> 'The parents have taken a greater role in the education of their children – which is a good thing – on the other hand we have had a lot of emails from parents asking for more work and so on and you see that their requirements have become quite extreme. We accept that every day as teachers, and we go to work and leave work. But this is just a whole different thing. And the pressure of parents in the background is worse. Some parents have lessons ... video call me straight away ... commenting on the lesson and wanting to give me advice. So little

hings like that don't give much more stress and a lot more stress. I know the needs of all the children in my class but I feel that I have to change the work to suit the parents.' (Teacher A4)

6.112   Schools have considered that children in some families may be sharing a device:

'We've sort of timetabled … classes at different times, because obviously there may be siblings in different classes and they may have limited devices. We don't have a crossover between families needing the same device to do Teams meetings. And that's worked really well'. (Teacher A2)

6.113   In monitoring pupils' behaviour and engagement online, schools tried to maintain continuity with their normal practice and procedures:

'But with a good pastoral team of head of years who do check in and see if there's any pupils who are not engaging, but also to keep in contact with the ones who are excelling and engaging as well, which is good. And then SLT uses Go for Schools and they've actually changed the behaviour system to note if they're not engage in an online lesson. So, there are now actually buttons you can click no which sends a message home to parents and goes to the head of years. So, they've edited that so that's available for us because before there was no button to say they weren't engaging online or that sort of thing.' (Teacher A3)

6.114   The move to distance learning has highlighted the importance of the relationship between schools and families and the need for realistic expectations on from both parties to underpin pupils' learning.

Reflections on the whole experience

6.115   The focus groups and surveys took place at the end of 2020 and beginning of 2021 so some of the participants took the opportunity to reflect on the experience as a whole. Some felt that it was important to maintain the same ethos as they would if the pupils were in school:

> 'During the first lockdown we made a conscious effort to carry on with our strong community school ethos. So, when it was a pupil's birthday, we'd put a message out as well that we wanted to wish them a happy birthday, and different things. And I think that was a nice thing at the beginning, wasn't it, as well, which we're still doing now. Again, that kind of drew back into the fact that we were a team and that we were thinking of each other.' (Teacher A2)

> 'But I don't know… It's the Corona roller coaster, isn't it? Some weeks are great and some weeks kind of feel as if you're trying to catch your tail.' (Teacher A2)

6.116   Teachers noted just how resilient some children have been:

> 'The children have been so resilient, haven't they. I remember getting myself quite upset in September because I hadn't done all the normal things that I would do to welcome this new cohort of children and parents – all the meetings, all the open days, all the visits to nursery and those lovely things where you get to have the incidental chats and things. And the children came in September, and some of them had never met me, and some of the parents haven't met me because they were new to the area, and they just waltzed into the classroom and because they didn't know that it was different, that there was a different layout of the classroom and that they didn't see the other children because it was new to them. So, I think that really just shows you how resilient they are.' (Teacher A2)

> 'The children are adapting incredibly well to the changes brought on by the pandemic. They have shown great resilience. They are greatly

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missing their friends and the routines which come with being in school. This is why our live streams are so important. They love to see their friends in this context and it is a great way for them to check in with their friends and look after their well-being.' (Teacher B1)

'That change can happen really quickly. Learning from the children and listening to learners can have a positive impact. Children can adapt more quickly than some adults. That live teaching is the way forward in a lockdown situation. All children have the right to that learning. The school have been able to lend out devices in order for some children to access remote and online learning.' (Teacher C2)

6.117   In this context, teachers lamented the lack of opportunity for the whole school to be together:

'It doesn't feel right without that community though, and the children, and the older children, really, have really missed mixing with those children. I can't remember, when you do a play time, the last time I saw the whole school. I really miss assemblies and when you sing with all the children and when you say hello to them all and see the siblings and everything. That's what I really miss so much.' (Teacher A2)

6.118   Some teachers experienced a change of perspective through working with pupils online:

'Mewn ffordd od dwi'n teimlo bo fi di dod i nabod rhai o'r disgyblion yn well yn y cyfnod yma achos ti'n sylwi fod so and so heb neud y gwaith, a ti'n darllen mewn mwy i'w anghenion nhw, ac yn trial dod i nabod disgyblion bach yn well er mwyn darparu'r cyfleodd iddyn nhw.'

'In a strange way I feel like I know some of the pupils better at this time because you notice that so and so hasn't done the work, and you are more in tune with their needs, and trying to get to know little pupils better in order to provide them with the opportunities.' (Teacher A5)

6.119   In one school, there was concern to challenge the discourse of lost learning and a teacher emphasised what 'pupils had achieved through distance learning:

> 'I'm surprised. Every day you look at the news and they say, oh, these kids are falling behind. And I know a lot of kids have fallen behind, but, you know, my experience with my kids shows that most of them have done really very well. I've taught, you know, year 10 a really complex topic this half term and they've learnt the whole thing all online. It doesn't seem to have been recognised that a lot of kids have done they have been doing well. They have been having lessons. They have been taught, haven't they? Most kids are engaging and getting a good education just a bit differently. I think it's a shame that hasn't been recognised. Maybe that's not the experience everywhere.' (Teacher A3)

6.120   Most teachers who participated in the focus groups or survey felt they had learned more about their practice and their pupils. They emphasised that the loss many children have experienced is the loss of interaction with their peers and the membership of the school community. Most teachers also expressed admiration for the way in which their pupils coped, and in some cases, thrived with distance learning.

Reflections on the whole experience – Looking to the future

6.121   Some teachers reflected on their earlier cautious use of technology, for reasons of wellbeing, and recognized its value:

> 'In the past, ICT has been something I have tried to limit my use of the classroom, as children nowadays are exposed to a lot of screen time, which is not particularly healthy for children. However, I have learnt that it is now something to be embraced, as it has been invaluable during the pandemic. ICT has allowed children to communicate with their peers to prevent them from becoming lonely, and it has also been the

saving grace in allowing them to continue with their education and learning during the pandemic.' (Teacher B1)

6.122 Most participants could see the potential for using online platforms and other aspects of the experience in the future. One aspect is recording content for both staff and pupils:

'I think another takeaway is the efficiency that doing some things online brings. Like I quite like the fact that we can record staff briefings in the morning so that if people have missed them, for example, you can actually look back.' (Teacher A1)

'Another good thing, I think, is perhaps if you had children missing out through illness, or while they were at the dentist, you could upload the PowerPoint on the teams, and if we still had our team groups for all year, you know, they could access the PowerPoint to catch up for you. Or you could put the homework on it, and continue to put homework on it, and use it in that sense.' (Teacher A1)

6.123 Working online through Teams and Google Classroom opens up various possibilities such as developing a learning dialogue with pupils or collaborating with other schools:

'I like the fact that with assignments, once you send the feedback back, and they've worked on that, they can then resubmit it. Certainly, the homework tasks, and having that dialogue, has been really useful.' (Teacher A1)

'I think we will definitely pursue and keep using Google classrooms. I think it's opened up a lot of worlds for us. I think we'd already started working with a couple of other cluster schools in doing projects online anyway.' (Teacher A1)

'I will continue using Google Classroom regularly when schools re-open, so the children are as familiar as possible with this platform in case schools close again in the future.' (Teacher B1)

6.124 Working online also offers a way of engaging with learners who cannot attend for some reason:

> 'For example, I have a pupil who suffers terribly with anxiety and hasn't been in school for two years and has missed out on a lot of work. When I spoke to Mum in a parents' evening a couple of weeks ago, I said, well, we need to look at obviously maybe trying to get their work home to them now that we've got and sussed these systems so that they're not missing out. Obviously, you know, what we want to do is combat the anxiety and get them back into school, but then there's a fine line between losing out on education and our pushing. So, these are things now that we can combat that we couldn't combat before. You know, for the last two years that person had missed out on a lot of education, which they won't have to do in the future, hopefully.' (Teacher A3)

6.125 Some of the schools in the sample are already participating in E-sgol but since distance learning has given all staff the experience of remote teaching, there is greater awareness of how this might benefit pupils in rural schools:

> 'Ma' hwn di agor lot o bosibiliadau... ni'n ysgol fach, ac rydyn ni am ddarparu gymaint o gyfleoedd ag sy'n bosibl i'n disgyblion mewn pynciau sydd efallai yn llai poblogaidd, so, falle fod hyn wedi agor llwybr i ni o ran cynnig pynciau eraill i'r disgyblion ac wedi rhoi hyder i'r staff.'

> 'This has opened a lot of possibilities… the reality is that we're a small school, but we still want to offer as many opportunities to our pupils as we can, especially in those subjects which may be less popular, so, this may have opened a route for us to follow in offering us the opportunity to offer increased subject choices to our pupils, and has given our staff the confidence to follow those opportunities.' (Teacher A4)

6.126 One teacher took quite a long perspective on the experience:

'I fi, fel hanesydd, dwi'n gweld fod y 12 mis diwethaf wedi golygu fod addysg, a'r byd addysg, wedi gorfod datblygu yn fwy na beth mae e wedi dros y cant a hanner mlynedd ddiwethaf. Dwi'n teimlo fod e'n gyfnod lle mae'r elfennau yna o'r oes Fictoraidd - sef le mae addysgu wedi bod am gyfnod hir iawn - o athro o flaen y dosbarth yn neud y gwaith caib a rhaw o ddysgu rhesi o blant o'u blaen nhw, fod hyn wedi golygu fod y traddodiad yna wedi mynd ar chwâl. Mae'r newidiadau yn y byd addysg nawr, a'r ffordd yr ydym ni wedi gorfod ymateb drwy fod yn hyblyg a defnyddio technoleg yn golygu ein bod ni fel corff o staff yn ein hysgol ni wedi symud ymlaen o arferion canrif a hanner mewn byr amser.'

'To me, as a historian, I see that the last 12 months have been a spur to the development of the world of education. Things have had to change more in that period than what they've had to in the last 150. I feel that those elements carried froward from the Victorian age, which have been with us for so long, i.e. that of a teacher stood in front of a class of rows of pupils, has finally been forced to transform. The changes enforced by COVID[-19], including the necessity to be adaptable and creative, especially with the use of technology, means that that the staff within our school have finally left the traditions of the last 150 years behind, and have done that in a very short time frame.' (Teacher A5)

6.127   Another consequence of COVID-19 protocols had a very welcome effect in one school which they are keen to sustain:

'And this may sound really silly now, but I'm going to say it, since September, when we've been using hand sanitiser and hand washing and all the other things, the amazing thing is, and I shouldn't tempt fate here, but we haven't had any children be sick, any cases of diarrhoea, or any cases of other unspeakable illness. And there's a reason for that. And you know what I think - not that we don't like children to wash their hands here because we do - but children being children, sticking

their hands under a tap for two seconds is not hand washing! And I definitely think that we would continue to use things like hand sanitiser, perhaps not as regularly, but certainly at certain times in the day, because it has been remarkably as a side effect, and has made a difference. We haven't had any sickness bugs at all since September. It's tempting fate. We'll all be off next week!' (Teacher A2)

6.128 For some teachers, the experience has caused them to commit to more outdoor education to provide a balance and a safe learning environment:

'Moving forward, I wish to develop my knowledge and experience of outdoor education and forest schools, as outdoor time has been incredibly important during the pandemic. When schools reopen, taking lessons outdoors will minimise the anxieties of being in such close contact with the children, but also massively improve the well-being of myself and the children. I will try to plan for a variety of lessons and activities to be based outdoors, as well as leading nature-based well-being sessions for children through Forest School.' (Teacher B1)

6.129 Summarising their experiences, teachers are full of praise for their pupils and colleagues:

'Children have experienced a lot of changes in the past year and have adapted extremely well to whatever has been thrown at them. I have learnt of the huge amount of resilience that children have. I also think that myself and other teaching staff have shown a great amount of strength to continue our roles in the past year. We have adapted extremely well with very short notice to various situations, and I am very proud of all education settings.' (Teacher B1)

'Being open to change and how the children of the future can learn. Learners in the 21st century will learn in different ways than past generations. Learning a new skill maybe hard in the first instance but if it helps children access learning then it must be beneficial. You are never too old to learn a new trick.' (Teacher C4)

6.130 Teachers have reflected on their experience of online teaching: on their day-to-day practice; their work as teams; and on their schools as communities. Valuable professional learning has taken place but there is no doubt of the teachers' priorities:

> 'Deep down we know the best way to teach children is by having them here, isn't it, physically. We've tried to put our essence of teacher into the virtual environment, basically.' (Teacher A2)

> 'Teachers are amazing. Children are resilient. Parents & the media should appreciate and respect schools far more than they do. Teachers can adapt when supported and are more than willing to accept change.' (Teacher B2)

Summary

6.131 The first lockdown in March 2020 was very disruptive for teachers; schools and individuals responded in a variety of ways. Over successive lockdowns practice developed significantly in all schools sampled. There was a strong focus in all schools on adapting practice to support students' wellbeing as they faced the challenge of online learning.

- Schools made independent decisions about the choice of online platform to suit their learners' needs. In some cases the decision was based on a pre-existing adoption of the platform. Some teachers, however, felt pressurised to use specific approaches by WG or the county. Schools used a range of approaches: live online teaching; asynchronous online; paper copies distributed by post or hand.
- Teachers reported that their skills in delivering online learning developed over successive lockdowns and they had access to a wide range of training in online teaching. They valued the support available from counties and consortia but especially from specialists in schools.

- The data shows that there were clear differences in the teachers' experiences in different phases of lockdown while the return to school and blended learning brought additional challenges. Schools adopted flexible approaches in response to learners' needs in terms of their access to hardware and problems with connectivity. During the first lockdown lack of hardware for teachers and learners was an issue, with connectivity in rural areas remaining a problem throughout the different phases.

- The teachers' and the schools' knowledge of their learners, their families and their communities enabled them to respond flexibly to needs, including providing support to parents. Throughout the period, however, learners' engagement was a constant challenge. In addition teachers re-evaluated their identification of vulnerable pupils. Some were rendered vulnerable by the circumstances while others flourished.

- Primary teachers reported being dependent on the support and intervention of parents to enable pupils to access to learning, although some teachers reported feeling pressurised by parents' demands. Teachers of practical subjects in secondary schools (art, textiles, design technology, PE) faced additional challenges.

- Teachers also reported a significant increase in workload due to online teaching and noted feelings of isolation from colleagues. Some schools attempted to replicate informal staff communication to support wellbeing.

- Teachers are now in the process of identifying what aspects of their adaptive practice they will retain in future.

7.   Findings: ITE Student Voice

Implications for initial teacher education

7.1   The research call asked for consideration of the implications of COVID-19 on Initial Teacher Education. As part of the research project we explored the experience of Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate (PG) ITE students on placement during the March 2020-February 2021 and what can we learn from their experience for the development of future ITE students. Data was collected from ITE student across the three HEIs, involving students on UG ITE (Year 1 and Year 3) and PG ITE courses.

What was experience for ITE students in schools? March 2020 - February 2021

7.2   The students had different levels of teaching experience, those in the final year of a UG degree had been in face-to-face classrooms with a stable environment and were able to make comparisons. For students on UG and PG courses starting in September 2020, they started their teaching course in period of constant change.

Experience of teaching placement in a blended environment

7.3   As articulated earlier in the report, teachers were placed in a challenging situation by the move to distance and blended learning and ITE students were not different. HEIs had to work with schools in fluid situation to provide placement opportunities for their students. Students reported different levels of preparation.

> 'I honestly feel like we were prepared pretty well with the team…I think they've done a good job in keeping us open minded to change. As teachers, you obviously have to keep adapting to everything'. (UG Yr. 3 student)

'We were thrown right into a situation in January where we were trying to navigate round platforms…It's been hard to, you know, engage with lessons etc. with minimal training' (PG student)

7.4   One group of students discussed their action research projects in schools during placement. This focused on a 4 week period November 2020- December 2020. Students were normally in school 1 day a week and the remainder of engagement was a blended learning approach. Schools worked with the students to provide them with some face-to-face experience and online activity and the students amended their plans to work in a blended manner.

'all my sessions were recorded due to the timetabling in the class and it was just more convenient for the class teacher for me to send in recordings for the children to do in their own time then, so they would engage with the tasks, I'd set…..So physically in one day and then everything else behind the scenes doing things remotely for the other four.' (UG Yr. 3 student)

7.5   Another student reflected that they needed to focus on monitoring student engagement and worked with the class teacher to go into school on 2 half days to collect feedback and encourage engagement

'rather than going in for a full day, I split mine up over two half days.. Most of them would pick up work they were set over an online platform, however, many did find quite a few excuses why they didn't. So, with it being spread over the week allowed me to set work on a Tuesday and then go in on a Thursday and pick up where they have and haven't got.' (UG Yr. 3 student)

7.6   Some students were given the opportunity to deliver online live lessons.

'For me, I do live lessons. I didn't do any pre-recorded material. We started with 120 minute live lessons, at the beginning and then we moved on to 80 minute sessions as 120 was a bit too long for the students. It's a live lesson. We don't have any previously recorded

material although we do record the lesson that we're teaching' (PG student)

What did blended learning look like?

7.7 Students saw different applications/interpretations of blended learning during their placements in schools and this influenced their approach. Approaches differed across schools due to the needs of the learners. They also commented on the potential of developing independent learners through blended learning in the classroom.

'Blended learning isn't just online, my mentor said it's giving them different opportunities to learn through. Blended experiences are different ways to overcome a problem or to solve an issue really' (UG Yr. 3 student)

'My blended experience wasn't just considered as online learning….rather than an online-based blended approach, it was blended through independence and then me as help.' ' (UG Yr. 3 student)

'I was in foundation phase….I'd go away in the week and the children would communicate with me via seesaw and they would be using the activities that I've set them in the provision. So rather than taking them away from or adding to any learning that the teacher had sat them, they could just do it independently' (UG Yr. 3 student)

7.8 The students were very aware of the needs of their learners and developed approaches that were possible to be done at home

'had QR codes for Tutorials, which is very accessible for home. The resources I used I made sure that it would be household materials that they would likely have in the House….I was focusing on fine motor skills' (UG Yr. 3 student)

7.9   The students observed different approaches from running the schools day as a 'normal day', using an online platform but structured in the same way as f2f to approaches that were more flexible and looked different responding to the needs of learners and parents.

> 'My school made the decision quite early on to try and maintain their timetable, but moved on to live lessons. So lessons will be scheduled for when they would usually have had them in school. However, they found that that was a really sharp decline in attendance and engagement. So they decided to make a move to using Google Classroom and to have pre-recorded lessons up, mostly using power points and then maybe some video guidance when that was needed' (PG student)

> 'It still seems to be the same way of learning that the teacher has pre-recorded the presentation and the activities to do. And the only thing missing there then is the physical group discussion…Maybe they need to look at different avenues at how it can be used more effectively over an online platform I think.' (UG Yr. 3 student)

> 'it's new to everyone,… the online platform, it seems to be brilliant. The children are really computer literate to be honest and they know exactly what they're doing. But as far as the school is concerned, I think because it's something new to everyone, they're trying to keep with the old way of learning through a new way of learning if that makes sense' (UG Yr. 3 student)

7.10   Students were grateful for the support that they received whilst on placement by their schools.

> 'I've been lucky that I can actually go to the school and I have regular meetings with them. No question is too big or too small for them.' (PG student)

> 'my school had two regular sessions a week …[you] could join the meeting and learn a few different aspects of the different online tools,

and all the student teachers were meant to be there as well' (PG student)

Learning and teaching approaches observed by ITE students

7.11   The students had the opportunity to see blended and distance learning in action and reflected on its impact on approaches to learning and teaching and also their own practice. They could appreciate the challenge of trying to maintain a familiar structure. However they also observed how schools were trying to be flexible in delivery to cope with the requirements of parents during lockdown.

> 'The teacher would give the input and then she'd encourage group discussion and then they'd go away and do things independently or work in pairs or groups to produce different pieces of work. And there was one session I sat in on line because you needed another person for safeguarding purposes.' (UG Yr. 3 student)

> 'The style of lesson seemed to be the same, you know, and then she'd like give the input, Let the children do something. Then they'd upload their work and then she'd assess it and give feedback at that point then.' (UG Yr. 3 student)

> 'It's new to everyone, the online platform, it seems to be brilliant. The children are really computer literate to be honest and they know exactly what they're doing. But as far as the school is concerned, I think because it's something new to everyone, they're trying to keep with the old way of learning through a new way of learning if that makes sense' (UG Yr. 3 student)

> 'Because it's new to us all. It's just finding strategies that work for yourself, work for the learners and the limitations are there for, and restrictions are there for safety aren't they so, I don't, it's not, I don't think it's going to be as free flowing as it would be in the classroom at all, but it's just finding the midpoint, really, I think. It's just hard, it's just

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a juggling act isn't it? Meeting their needs and collating the information that you need, as well as a practitioner.' (UG Yr. 3 student)

Technology

7.12 Students experience many of the technology apps reported by the teachers who responded to the surveys, interviews and focus groups in this study. The students saw schools where technology was rooted into teaching and learning.

> 'They had always used Google Classroom. It's all uploaded to Google Classroom with or without COVID[-19]…It's always been embedded' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

7.13 Flip Grid was cited as a good online discussion tool. See Saw was heavily used in primary settings. Google classroom and Teams was used across the sectors. There was positive feedback about what was available on HWB,

> 'HWB has had all the tools I've needed so far [inc. software]. I haven't had to look outside of that. ' (PG student)

7.14 Many students were encouraged to share their knowledge of technology on their placements and there are examples of students acting as consultants for their schools during the period March 2020-February 2021.

> 'We felt that we were able to support class teachers with their understanding of how they can use technology' (UG Yr1 student)

7.15 Access to technology which had appeared as a key concern with all groups in this research project was also cited by the students as an issue for themselves and their learners

> 'I had to buy a laptop so that I could actually do lessons…' (PG student)

> 'Lack of appropriate IT equipment in the family home. Many families only had a phone with limited data or not enough devices for all children in the family' (PG student)

'They might not have the tools, the technology, the software, the equipment, the connectivity, I just think that you have a robbed experience at the minute. (PG student)

7.16   One group of students also talked about a positive use of social media to share practice.

'The Twitter community's is been fab, you know just to see what other teachers are doing. You know in their classrooms' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

Engaging learners in blended learning

7.17   Some students were given the opportunity to explore learner centred approaches with a particular focus on learner engagement. They considered the challenges and surfaced some important advantages. The quotations below reflect their experiences and how they worked with the children

'The freedom was something completely new to them… at first it seemed to set them back. I don't know what I'm doing because I'm not being told what to do. By the end the engagement was through the roof' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

'The remote learning task then was to create a recipe for kindness based on what we discussed in the session, and they had the freedom to do it whichever way they wanted. They could have drawn it, used digital technology…student agency, give them freedom.' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

'There's only about 50% engagement with online work and assignments being handed in.' (PG Student)

'Google classroom is … quite good at recording engagement. So when you assign something to the class, you get can see how many have been assigned and then you can see how many have been handed in. And those numbers very, very rarely go above 50 percent. And my teachers have told me many times, you know, don't expect more than four or five returns on these answers.' (PG student)

'because we're not doing live lessons…feedback is coming through the kind of the private comments that you can leave on students work. So obviously, we have less students handing in the work and then you have limited space and the ability to actually give feedback' (PG student)

'pupil voice worked quite well in engaging learners. So I did ask them what they wanted to do in Art. A lot of the boys wanted to make Minecraft Santas [and had access to this at home] it was the engagement that came with it. I thinking keeping it authentic as well.' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

7.18   They also noticed different strategies in different sectors of education. For example, the Yr1 undergraduate students who participated in this research were placed in Foundation Phase settings and they observed more of a focus on games and engagement than learning and an emphasis on supporting social interaction.

7.19   A concern was expressed by one student of the impact of distance learning on learners who had behavioural problems

'I can't be 100% certain that it's the case, but I think there is an obvious trend of those students who might have behavioural issues. They seem to be the students that don't turn up to lessons or don't engage or don't do the work. So I think there's a clear pattern, if you like. I would say that as far as engagement goes - and speaking with my mentors - it does sound like those students that in the classroom would be engaged and focussed are also the ones who engage online.' (PG student)

7.20   One student reflected on the challenges of an on-going changing situation that would need to be addressed at some point.

'I think part of the problem is that we've been kind of looking for the light at the end of the tunnel so long… But obviously, all of this time has added up to form this really big chasm between those who are

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engaging in the work and those who are not. And I'm really dreading going into school for those seven weeks, because I just know that that's going to be such a gap where I'm going be at a place in my scheme of work where I think right, because I've set it, everyone should know what I'm doing but what's gonna happen for the students who have done all the work?' (PG student)

Challenges of distance and blended learning

7.21   The students observed that the teachers were facing challenges in motivating and engaging their learners at a distance and also parents/carers

'You can see the challenges of doing it online. You know it's difficult to make sure everybody's understanding because obviously in the classroom you can read body language and see facial expressions as to whether someone's grasping what you're discussing or not, whereas online, it's not as easy.' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

'If there's something that the students don't understand then there's less incentive to contact the teacher and ask because it's different. In the class you can kind of see where people who are struggling. You can walk around, you can look at work. But online it feels like a bit more of a risk' (PG student)

'you know so there was chat going on, not all of it appropriate to the task, but that's by the by you can see how challenging that part of it was You know, trying to keep children focused on what exactly the subject was and what do we need to talk about? Not have you got a dog miss? Or things like that' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

7.22   There were also concerns about the impact that COVID-19 was having on pupils and having to be mindful of the well-being of learners.

'So there's this hesitancy to be too strict or to push too far because you don't know the home circumstances. We get emails every couple of

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weeks saying that, oh, such and such has lost their father or such and such as lost a family member... You know, it it's difficult.' (PG student)

7.23   They also observed concerns about children not meeting success criteria and were struggling with a distance learning environment but they also observed some positive stories too.

> 'Many of the children do not meet the success criteria. They were just completely sending things that weren't relevant or they weren't grasping the concepts and also the words. And I do feel looking back, if it had been a live lesson for example, you could have broken it down and scaffolded it a bit better' (UG Yr3 Student)

> 'How far behind some children are after every stint of distance learning. The gap between the top and bottom achievers has widened and worse some children have gone backwards in their development. There is also a push on catching up' which is unhealthy and stressful for pupils and teachers alike.' (PG ITE student)

> 'Some learners have developed further due to home support and some have suffered.' (UG Yr1 Student)

7.24   A challenge was not being able to observe the learner's learning process and only see the final product. Students expressed a concern about only seeing a product

> 'found was that depending on how you approach the blended learning you're only seeing a product of what they've produced rather than a process... make a clay Christmas tree, for example, I wanted to look at them step by step, look at using their fine motor skills to pinch the clay' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

7.25   Students also commented on the safeguarding requirements they had seen.

> 'There was one session I sat in online because you needed another person for safeguarding purposes.' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

7.26   Connectivity was a challenge for many of the schools

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'My school also provides laptops. But the most commonly reported thing is connectivity. So it doesn't matter what laptop they have, if they don't have Wi-Fi or if they can't connect to the Internet consistently… [Because] when they do feel inspired to do the work, they might sit down, but if there's a brief Internet spike, then they might look at that and think, OK, forget it.' (PG student)

'being in a rural area also means that they're feeling a bit more isolated' (PG student)

7.27 Also a concern that it was not always connectivity that was causing a problem.

'A lot of it is blamed on connectivity issues. Obviously, we can't really tell whether that's an excuse or if it's really a problem. (PG student)

7.28 Students observed the challenge of parental engagement to support distance and blended learning.

'Parents not engaging with tasks was the biggest barrier' (UG Yr. 3 Student)

'Parents not able to help hindered learning…. They had other roles' (UG Yr1 Student)

What are the implications for ITE

'We are probably the most resilient cohort of training teachers to ever have come out… I think the ability to build kind of strong, quick, professional relationships with students will be a really good tool to move forward' (PG student)

7.29 The students put forward suggestions about how we can prepare students to teach in a blended learning environment and the role of technology

7.30 A number of the students talked about the importance of being exposed to different approaches in University to develop a broad toolkit and be confident and resilient.

'I think having to be adaptable shows we can be resilient and yeah, it I've learned so much throughout the whole process with technology and with different ways of teaching and learning' (UG year 3 student)

'You just want to be exposed to different options, different methods, different platforms you can used….Obviously you have to fit in with what the school uses, but it's just having the confidence to be adaptable to different methods and just see different ways of doing things.' (UG year 3 student)

'Keeping us open minded to change'. (UG year 3 student)

'In terms of teacher training, just be presented with all the different options you can do and just to get inspiration as to the direction you can potentially go in.' (UG year 3 student)

'It's being opened up to all avenues of the blended and remote learning aspects.' UG year 3 student

7.31 Using blended learning to support learning at home. When designing learning think about what could be done in school and what could be done in the home.

'Any activity that we do, maybe just alongside it suggesting how it could be done at home as well…just that parallel approach to promote the blended learning approach. Would it best fit in schools or would it best fit at home' (UG year 3 student)

'Making sure that parents know how that can do things at home and find tools that they can use' (UG year 1 student)

7.32 Understanding models of blended learning. Blended learning can offer opportunities not just during crisis periods but to support learners in the classroom and support learners that may have challenges linked to attending school.

7.33 Technology skills that are underpinned by pedagogy. Some students felt that they were well prepared for a technology enhanced environment and felt it was an essential part of the ITE curriculum.

'We need effective training on how to plan, deliver and assess online learning as we had nothing more than a google how to session. This was helpful from an ICT point of view but lacked the pedagogical focus needed' (PG ITE student)

'Not all schools are aware of what devices are needed and what to use with them. There should be a focus on this for ITE students' (UG Yr1 student)

7.34 Opportunities during placements to be able to work with teachers to experiment with technology based approaches.

'A chance to share ideas with class teachers and learn together to bring ideas to life' (UG Yr1 student)

Summary

7.35 From our observations and conversations with teachers, ITE staff and students there are clear implications for how we develop our teachers of the future. The data captured how the ITE providers in this study amended their approaches to ensure students had teaching experience during the pandemic and also identified areas of knowledge and skills development for ITE courses.

7.36 The key messages are:

- There are implications for the subject knowledge and skills that we develop with our new teachers
- HEI worked with schools to provide experience of teaching placing in a blended environment and all involved demonstrated flexibility, resilience and adaptability

- ITE students provided valuable reflections on what blended learned looked like in schools
- ITE students were provided with the opportunity to use their digital skills to support schools
- Valuable lessons were learnt by HEIs, ITE students and schools about engaging learners with blended learning
- There are insightful observations about the challenges of distance and blended learning for the profession
- There implications for online learning and teaching and safeguarding and the need for connected discussions with other agencies involved in the life of the child
- ITE students have put forward suggestions about how we can prepare for teaching in a blended environment and these are reflected in the recommendations

8. Findings: Consortia Voice

8.1 Officers from three consortia responded to a request for information either by interview or written response. Information shared by consortia with the schools has also been included as an element of the advice and support provided.

8.2 The findings are presented in regard to the following themes

- Continuity of support
- Guidance
- Professional learning offer
- Impact of COVID-19
- Perspectives on schools' experience
- Challenges
- Opportunities
- Looking ahead

Continuity of support

8.3 All consortia representatives interviewed emphasised the continuity of provision in supporting schools in developing blended learning:

'Blended learning had been part of the region's professional learning (PL) offer before COVID[-19] as it is referenced in the pedagogical principles in Successful Futures and some schools were already beginning to use virtual learning platforms such as Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams/OneNote and the J2 Suite on Hwb to help organise in class learning and homework.' (Con2)

> 'We had our existing professional learning offer in place before COVID[-19] and what became very clear was when the pandemic hit and that there was this need to provide teacher learning' (Con 1)

8.4 Consortia saw their role in the pandemic as continuing with their usual remit but in changed circumstances.

Guidance

8.5   The consortia played a role in developing the guidance on blended learning with Welsh Government and communicating that guidance to schools.

> 'So when the lockdown first happened, March 2020, we worked with Welsh Government to establish a clear emerging understanding of what blended and distance learning will constitute and what it entails for schools.' (Con 3)

8.6   The guidance was informed by international experience and good practice:

> 'I think our first role was really to learn from international research and what was happening with the pandemic internationally because we knew that there were some education systems that perhaps were dealing with this slightly ahead of us. (Con1)

8.7   The consortia provided a channel by which international good practice was shared with schools.

Professional learning offer

8.8   The Welsh Government guidance and international experience informed the training that consortia were able to offer to schools, as did the experience of schools in Wales that had made progress in digital learning before the pandemic:

> 'Regions provided a wealth of 'How to information' in a range of media synchronously and asynchronously delivered for schools to access, as well as guidance around the safe use of virtual learning platforms. I produced [a] Google Site that attempted to synthesise all the information into one place and it includes a number of interviews with schools who shared their practice from those early days in the first lockdown to offer support to other schools.' (Con 2)

> 'We created a bespoke support centre where we shared all the digital learning resource's. (Con3)

8.9 At the same time as meeting the increased need for professional learning focused on blended learning, consortia also addressed pedagogy:

'So we then really had to redesign the offer in line with what schools wanted. We obviously focused on digital learning, but then complemented by what we knew good effective teaching to be and learning was and how that could work within the digital space in terms being at distance from the students and the teachers'. (Con1)

8.10 The provision has been offered on a large scale:

'Recently, I have been running a project with 41 schools in Remote Asynchronous Learning Design. The schools have received playlists linked to Behaviourist, Cognitivist and Constructivist playlists and workshops to explore pedagogy relating to remote asynchronous learning. (Con2)

8.11 Support has also been offered in the established patterns of cluster working with specialist support:

'So I worked at the time with two clusters. I worked with the head teachers to review that guidance And then we arranged the webinars or meetings. I could deliver to the staff or if I wasn't up to the technical aspect of those discussions, I would refer them to my digital framework teams, my colleagues, then they would take over and answer specialist questions'. (Con 3)

'So we've kept all of our networks up and running in so that they felt connected with other practitioners across the region so that we were able to share what we were learning and we kept that as an ongoing feature. We established a new network were we felt that there may be some gaps. (Con1)

8.12 Existing networks were used but new channels and networks were developed as appropriate.

Impact of COVID-19

8.13   Consortia staff identified different direct impacts, some focusing on potential benefits:

> 'We have had to change the way we deliver PL and actually I think it has been an improvement. Now that everything is available via Teams we can reach out to far more schools than when we were presenting face to face. We have continued to support them in their professional learning by offering a range of PL opportunities in the areas of: Health and Well-being, Digital Learning, Research Enquiry, Curriculum for Wales, Leadership and the Welsh Language. (Con2)

8.14   For other the loss of school visits has presented a challenge, especially for schools in Estyn monitoring:

> 'There's been a hiatus in any sort of book scrutiny, observing lessons, obviously, that all that's been on hold, which is a core part of what you understand [about schools]. So no book scrutiny, learning walks. Any in-depth discussions with teachers and senior leadership teams. They've taken place on Teams, but they've been difficult to do those things and also have a common view of the evidence in terms of you're looking at book's. (Con3)

8.15   While there are some aspects of consortia work that will be enhanced by lessons learned in the pandemic, other core aspects such as the understanding gained from school visits, has been on hold.

Perspectives on schools' experience

8.16   Each consortia had a unique perspective on the experience of schools that they know well and was able to reflect on the range of responses from the schools.

> 'Some schools that perhaps were more effective as in terms of their learning organization journey … had already demonstrated the ability to be agile and change. For example making good progress towards

managing the Curriculum for Wales implementation. Or maybe they had forward thinking digital strategies so technology was integrated in the teaching and learning. I think those schools that were catalysts. Whereas perhaps schools that didn't have as effective digital strategies, for example, for whatever reason, the infrastructure hadn't been there in the school, found it more difficult. (Con1)

'It has been a very mixed picture. Early adopters made huge strides and provided excellent provision for their learners, but there was definitely a wide spectrum of digital ability as well as pedagogical understanding. A huge amount of progress was made between first and second lockdowns with much more synchronous teaching in the latter. This made remote learning closer to face to face provision but also had its pitfalls in terms of pupil engagement and well-being. (Con2)

'I think it's been incredibly challenging and seems that they've been inundated by a tsunami of protocols and guidelines and advice, maybe too much advice. But I think they've done really well, actually, really well just to remain some of them as a functioning organisations. And they've seemed to have been able to organise reasonably effective blended learning, distance learning and latterly the return school'. (Con3)

8.17 There is a recognition that although there were variations, there were also examples of excellent practice throughout. Schools that had already begun to incorporate digital learning were at an advantage as were those which had a record of managing change effectively.

8.18

Challenges

8.19 Rather than generalizing, one consortium noted that challenges varied in different sectors and that this had an impact on the support needed:

'There was a PL session specifically focussed on special needs around some of the challenges around children who can't communicate. Also a session on how do we communicate with parents and, you know, that parental responsibility and relationship is so important. Then secondary schools thinking about the challenges around timetabling and rethinking lessons, particularly when they were back on site. There were a variety of different challenges for different settings, but then they was equally some strong learning'. (Con1)

'It exposed some very low levels of digital and pedagogical understanding in some of our schools and shone a spotlight on those who understood what was needed. The focus on distance learning has delayed schools' readiness for CfW as they haven't had the time or headspace to think beyond the immediate issues. The impact on vulnerable learners will leave a significant legacy. (Con1)

8.20 Some of the challenges were operational:

'But that was challenging because there was a point then [summer 2020] where I think the timetable for the term was really racing ahead of the rate of the information being provided to schools. They were maybe receiving stuff only just in time to make sense of it, to enable a sort of a seamless operational reopening. ' (Con3)

8.21 While is it difficult to generalize, and each sector and school had its own challenges, the schools that were already meeting their challenges, were more successful in adapting to distance learning. The experience added to the consortia's understanding of the progress schools were making in more general terms.

Opportunities

8.22 All consortia saw the experience of distance learning as providing opportunities for the future. The acceleration of learning and sharing of best practice presents an opportunity:

'I think it's definitely accelerated the work we were doing in terms of trying to capture best practice in teaching and learning within a digital space. It certainly has accelerated the learning around, you know, using digital tools to support teacher learning, for example. I'm just thinking around, some of the assessment tools schools are now using to provide more effective feedback and reduce the burden of marking and things like that'. (Con1)

8.23   The improvement in digital literacy skills and flourishing of creativity was noted:

'A new way of delivering PL, a better understanding of what is actually being taught in schools in the region and approaches to pedagogy. Removing accountability measures has allowed creativity to flourish. Massive up-skilling in digital literacy for all. (Con2)

8.24   The need to develop new approaches quickly opened opportunities for conversations about pedagogy and Curriculum for Wales.

'But I think a lot of talk about the impacts on opportunities for schools, the consortia to maybe promote Curriculum for Wales principles'. (Con3)

8.25   The advent of easier access to professional learning and collaboration was identified as an important opportunity to improve the efficiency, especially in rural areas:

'Definitely [an opportunity] to work more efficiently, and I think within that it could be, dare I say, some cost saving measures with no environmental impacts of pollution and driving around and making more efficient use of our time. So it is actually more efficient to be able to just, you know, work remotely and not have to drive to school.' (Con3)

Looking ahead

8.26   Among resources shared with the research term was a leaflet the one consortia was encouraging schools to use to promote a balanced message to parents which, while acknowledging the difficulties and loss experienced by many families, also recognises that the school has striven to support its learners and that:

> 'However, some children / students have excelled, showing that they can work with independence, and adapt to using technology as well as many more skills that they may not have had an opportunity to exercise in the period pre-pandemic. [Striking the Balance, EAS]

8.27   The leaflet also acknowledges the importance of using language carefully, recognising that it frames experience. Schools can use the leaflet to guide language choices towards:

- Powering Up
- Reconnect
- Renewal
- Supporting each other
- Working together
- Seizing opportunities
- Bringing solutions and solving problems
- Engaging with our community
- Moving together
- Opportunity and innovation
- 'Tomorrow will be a good day' (Captain Sir Tom Moore)

[Striking the Balance, EAS]

8.28   The leaflet also cautions against using language which has gained currency in some media representations, stressing the importance of sharing a positive message with children and young people:

- Loss of learning
- Everyone needs to catch-up
- Narrowing the COVID-19 gap
- Start learning
- Falling behind
- Gaps in learning

8.29   Overall, the consortia have continued to work with schools in response to the schools' needs and circumstances. There has been an emphasis on sharing

good practice, both nationally and internationally, collaboration, and a range of training to meet different needs. The consortia recognise the importance of celebrating the achievements of learners during the pandemic and supporting schools in helping them to move forward.

Summary

8.30   From our observations and conversations with consortia staff, the following were identified in the data.

- Consortia saw their role as offering continuity of support for schools. Consortia used their knowledge of schools to adapt guidance to offer appropriate support. It was noted that challenges varied from school to school.
- Consortia were able to offer training on a large scale to schools but adapted the ways in which training was delivered. Working with WG the consortia contributed to online learning guidance with reference to international examples.
- The necessity to move to digital learning has accelerated the rate of change in schools with a consequent improvement in digital literacy skills. In addition the move to online learning opened further conversations about pedagogy.
- The consortia emphasised the success of the schools' move to digital learning and encouraged schools to celebrate this and to present a positive message to pupils and their families.

9. Main Findings

9.1 This study sought to investigate some of the issues relating to the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the experiences of schools and stakeholders. We aimed to capture the collective experiences of partner schools, learners, parents/carers, regional consortia and ITE students. The sample for this research was dictated by the terms of the call from Welsh Government and explores responses, captures experiences of practice, makes recommendations for the sector and considers what we can learn for ITE professional development and learning.

9.2 The main findings organised in themes are summarised below.

Adapting

9.3 Schools had to adapt quickly to the initial lockdown and needed to implement a new way of working in a relatively short amount of time. However, schools who were previously using digital platforms/programs talked of a smoother transition to online learning.

9.4 Schools responded rapidly to the demands of distance learning despite the initial shock. Their priority was to find approaches that worked for their pupils and collaboration in and between schools played an important role in developing practice. Schools continually adapted practice through the different stages of lockdown and in response to feedback from pupils and their families to maximise pupils' engagement with their learning.

Provision for Learners

9.5 There was a broadly equal combination of live online, asynchronous online, hard copies by post across the sample linked to learner needs and teacher experience. Subject departments in secondary schools and primary teams have had a degree of autonomy in designing learning aimed at specialist outcomes. While there has been obvious creativity, there is no substitute for pupils' access to the specialist resources and equipment available to them in secondary school for practical subjects or the interaction with peers and increasing independence of the Foundation Phase. It is possible that learners will require further opportunities to engage with certain aspects of their learning experience.

Professional Learning

9.6 The overall picture of professional learning available to teachers shows variation from an over-supply to minimal professional learning opportunities. The evidence suggests that centralising professional training e.g. through consortia or LEA, or commercial professional learning is useful to schools but that the element valued by schools is professional learning opportunities or support that responds to their specific needs. Schools report that this is especially effective when developed and delivered by their own staff.

9.7 As indicated above a few schools indicated the use of 'technological champions' in schools to lead on providing guidance for staff, parents and pupils. The use of a key individual was also seen as important within a few ITE partnerships.

9.8 There was some evidence of high levels of support provided by Local Education Authorities (LEA) as well as consortia but that this was not consistent access all of Wales.

Hardware and Connectivity

9.9 Several schools often referred to the need to purchase appropriate hardware for staff, as well as the need to distribute appropriate hardware for pupils when needed. Specifically, schools identified the need to distribute devices to vulnerable pupils and several sent out surveys to pupils to ascertain the level of hardware available to them and also to ascertain whether they experienced issues with connectivity.

9.10 Connectivity was a regular and consistent issue for all stakeholders including schools, staff, pupils and parents. Schools, were able to provide additional hardware, send out mi-fi devices to aid with connectivity, but these were not always effective.

9.11 From a pupil perspective there were challenges associated with technology and having access to devices and parental support, particularly if parents were working from home. Furthermore, working alone and being able concentrate was also reported as being a challenge. In some instances, access to Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) was inconsistent. However, despite the challenges, pupils found benefits in being able to choose the activities they wanted to engage in and

being able to work at their own pace was also seen as a positive aspect of blended learning.

Workload

9.12   The impact on teachers' workload was significant in all sectors. The level and nature of the increase varied according to the phase of lockdown and the individual's role in school. It is likely that the workload will continue to be higher than normal while there are Covid protocols in place in schools. The frustration for teachers was the re-planning of work as a temporary measure. Teachers consistently made themselves available to support their pupils e.g. via email and this added further to workload. The situation partially arose because pupils who had poor connectivity or limited access to hardware often completed schoolwork out of hours and contacted their teachers for help. There is a link between digital disadvantage and teacher workload. Staff often felt under pressure to respond and offer assistance to parents and pupils beyond their working hours and even during the holidays. Trainee teachers and Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) may feel further pressure to respond to parental/pupil queries.

Staff Wellbeing

9.13   The uncertainty of the unknown was a consistent trigger for anxiety amongst staff and a clearer roadmap, timeline, procedures that could be set out for future pandemics could be beneficial for staff.

9.14   Teachers are well aware of the need to maintain a healthy work-life balance but this was compromised by the demands of the situation (see also WG Covid project on wellbeing). An important aspect of teachers' wellbeing is the support of their colleagues: specifically models of support provided by senior leaders but also departments, teams or the whole school. The loss of this daily contact was a challenge for all teachers and schools adopted a combination of whole school strategies and self-discipline in their responses.

Pupil Engagement

9.15   There was a mixed picture of pupil engagement across the schools and over time, with many factors influencing the extent to which individual pupils engaged. It is

difficult to draw general conclusions but some points do emerge. It seems that pupils were able to engage with distance learning effectively if they had already been introduced to the platforms and activities before lockdown and when they themselves understood its importance. In primary schools, engagement was, to a large extent, dependent on parents' capacity to support their children, e.g. time, equipment, connectivity. In later lockdowns, experience varied as some learners became more comfortable with distance learning while others wearied of it. For some learners, teachers felt the independence offered by distance learning accelerated their progress.

9.16   Influence of the parents on pupil engagement and motivation was found to be key (see also WG Covid project 'Exploring the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Learners in Wales, Especially Those Considered Disadvantaged').

Pupils becoming Independent Learners

9.17   A positive outcome noted by a few schools was that they could see the development of more independent learners based on their experiences during lockdown. This would be something that they would like to develop further.

Vulnerable Pupils

9.18   Schools used their knowledge of their pupils and monitored engagement carefully to support known vulnerable learners. In addition, most re-evaluated their criteria for identifying those who were rendered vulnerable by the pandemic and developed support as appropriate. Some learners thrived on the security of working at home and receiving detailed support and feedback from their teachers. Schools found it difficult to keep in touch with vulnerable pupils and safeguarding issues were raised with social services on occasion.

Contact with Families

9.19   The move to distance learning has highlighted further the importance of the relationship between schools and families and the need for realistic expectations on from both parties to underpin pupils' learning.

Parental Support

9.20   Varied amounts of parental support was reported by all respondents. The amount of parental support usually depended on (i) parent availability (key worker of working from home); (ii) number of children requiring support in the household; (iii) parental confidence/knowledge in providing appropriate support and this was also linked to (iv) pedagogical approaches and techniques differed to their own experience and they felt unqualified to provide support to their children; (v) parental and pupil engagement and motivation; (vi) In Welsh medium schools those from English medium homes reported that their lack of language skills in Welsh had a significant impact on their ability to effectively support their child.

Consortia (LEAs)

9.21   Overall, the consortia have continued to work with schools in response to the schools' needs and circumstances. LEAs did not form part of the sample for this project, but school leaders and teachers referred to their role in supporting schools. There has been an emphasis on sharing good practice, both nationally and internationally, on collaboration, and a range of training to meet different needs. The consortia recognise the importance of celebrating the achievements of learners during the pandemic and supporting schools in helping them to move forward.

Implications for ITE providers

9.22   From our observations and conversations with teachers, ITE staff and students there are clear implications for how we develop our teachers of the future. The data captured how the ITE providers in this study amended their approaches to ensure students had teaching experience during the pandemic and also identified areas of knowledge and skills development for ITE courses.

Limitations

9.23   As noted in 2.15 there were some limitations to the data collection and the findings should be considered in the light of these. The timescale over which the data was collected meant that respondents were reporting on different stages of their experience of remote schooling. In addition, the data collection concluded before classroom-based teaching resumed so the data findings must be viewed as

reflecting the ongoing experience of remote schooling rather than an evaluation of the experience.

Final Note

9.24   The main findings noted here were found to be consistent across primary and secondary sectors, as well as across Welsh medium and English medium schools (for further discussion on the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on Welsh medium Education see the report entitled 'Accessing Welsh during the Covid-19 pandemic: challenges and support for non-Welsh-speaking households').

9.25   Most teachers/consortia/ITE staff and students who participated in the focus groups or survey felt they had learned more about their practice and their pupils during successive lockdowns. They emphasised that the loss many children have experienced is the loss of interaction with their peers and the membership of the school community. This is borne out by the comments of parents and pupils themselves. Most teachers also expressed admiration for the way in which their pupils and parents coped, and in some cases, thrived with distance learning. All respondents have reflected on their day-to-day experiences their work as teams; and have further appreciated their schools as communities. Valuable professional and individual learning has taken place which will inform future practice but there is no doubt of the teachers' priorities remain focused on providing the most effective experiences for their learners.

10. Recommendations

10.1   All respondents have reflected on their day-to-day experiences, their work as teams; and have further appreciated their schools as communities. Valuable professional and individual learning has taken place which will inform future practice but there is no doubt of the teachers' priorities remain focused on providing the most effective experiences for their learners.

10.2   The recommendations are grouped by theme and are of relevance to more than one stakeholder. The table below is a key which indicates which stakeholders are impacted by the recommendations set out below

Table 10.1: Relevance of themes to stakeholders.

Theme	Schools	Parents	Learners	ITE providers	Children and Young People's services	Consortia and LEAs	Estyn	WG	Education Workforce Council (EWC)
Adapting to change	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Professional learning and training	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•
Technology - Hardware	•					•	•	•	
Staff Workload and Wellbeing	•			•		•	•	•	•
Impact on learners	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Parental Support	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
ITE Providers	•			•	•	•	•	•	•

Actions for Stakeholders

10.3   The actions to be undertaken by relevant stakeholders are summarised below:

Welsh Government

Theme	Action
Hardware and Connectivity	- All schools should ensure that staff have access to the necessary equipment to deliver online learning. Similarly, learners need to have access to appropriate equipment. The additional cost should be reflected in the budgets apportioned to schools. - Steps should be taken to ensure all teachers and learners across Wales have adequate access to the Internet.
Staff Workload and Wellbeing	Recognition of the impact on teacher workload and the additional requirements of delivering learning in this way is essential. This must be understood to inform future planning on a national, local and school level.
Impact on learners	Additional support/funding may be necessary to support those who have experienced a transition to another stage of their education during lockdown. This is important in general, but in particular for those moving from primary to secondary education and entering GCSEs/Year 12/College.
Parental Support	- Schools should maintain the regular contact and support provided to families that has developed during lockdown. Support for parents should be considered carefully when planning online provision (especially when a high level of parental support is required to complete tasks). Family support posts could be considered for schools to ensure families are supported effectively, and WG must consider the financial implications of such a development. - Training could be offered to parents on new techniques used in schools (specifically maths but also other subjects). This would ensure parents are more confident in supporting their child at home either with online learning or with additional learning activities. This is crucial if they are supporting the child in a language that is unfamiliar to them. Additional funding may be required to support schools in this.

LEAs and Consortia

Adapting to Change	There is an opportunity to provide clearer guidance and procedures to be followed in further lockdowns. A contingency plan could be put in place and updated regularly as part of school policy.
Professional learning and Training	- Consortia/LEAs should continue to support schools in developing the capacity to plan for the use of blended learning and celebrate the achievement of schools and learners during distance and blended learning. - Schools should be given the opportunity and encouraged to learn from the experience of other schools in developing their practice and exploring new online platforms and resources. - Schools should be encouraged to develop and use expertise in technology from within the school. The use of a 'technological champion' within schools could lead on this aspect.
Staff Workload and Wellbeing	Recognition of the impact on teacher workload and the additional requirements of delivering blended and distance learning is essential. This must inform future planning on a national, local and school level.

	• Senior leaders need to model impact on staff as part of normal practice. • Schools should work closely with LEAs/Consortia to ensure staff are adequately supported, and that additional support in managing workload, wellbeing is easily accessible to all staff. • Further professional learning opportunities should be tailored to tackling staff anxieties, i.e. training on developing confidence with digital/blended learning and effective working practices.
Impact on learners	• The online learning model has been effective for some cohorts of pupils but, further, a consideration should be given to the opportunities for autonomy of learning and choice as pupils reported such being a positive aspect of blended learning. Learners' voices and experiences should be listened to. • LEAs/regional school improvement services need a strategy to help schools measure engagement with home schooling. • Digital content should be incorporated into all subject provision to allow for a smoother change in any future pandemic. This would allow schools to integrate cross curriculum skills fully and to 'be confident users of a range of technologies to help them function and communicate effectively and make sense of the world.' • Additional support/funding may be necessary to support those who have experienced a transition to another stage of their education during lockdown. This is important in general, but in particular for those moving from primary to secondary education and entering GCSEs/Year 12/College.
Parental Support	• Schools should maintain the regular contact and support provided to families that has developed during lockdown. Support for parents should be considered carefully when planning online provision (especially when a high level of parental support is required to complete tasks). Family support posts could be considered for schools to ensure families are supported effectively • Schools should be encouraged to use all possible avenues to engage parents and learners. Increased use of social media is an option to consider. Further training on effective use of social media may be required. Social media champions should be recognised and use of social media should be discussed as part of ITE. • There is room to consider, a more integrated co-construction approach to learning, going beyond traditional methods of setting homework. This is particularly important in relation to developing and nurturing Welsh language skills, and particularly in those contexts where Welsh is not easily accessible unless opportunities are created as an extension on the school experience. • A level of bilingual guidance and support is key to ensuring parents of pupils from English medium homes who attend Welsh medium education are adequately supported.

Schools

Adapting to Change	• There is an opportunity to provide clearer guidance and procedures to be followed in possible further lockdowns and for groups who may have challenges with face-to-face learning. A contingency plan could be put in place and updated regularly as part of school policy.
Professional learning and Training	• Schools should be given the opportunity and encouraged to learn from the experience of other schools in developing their practice and exploring new online platforms and resources.

	• Schools should also be encouraged to develop and use expertise in technology from within the school and expertise should be recognised. The use of a 'technological champion' within schools could lead on this aspect (some schools have already benefitted from the use of such a champion).
Hardware and Connectivity	• Schools should request information from parents about technology available in the home to enable appropriate support to be in place.
Staff Workload and Wellbeing	• Recognition of the impact on teacher workload and the additional requirements of delivering learning in this way. This must be understood to inform future planning on a national, local and school level. • Senior leaders need to model impact on staff as part of normal practice. • The creation of online groups/buddies in supporting staff (especially when teaching remotely). Support networks should continue to be encouraged in schools to ensure teachers, be those trainee teachers, NQTs, experienced staff or senior leaders are adequately supported. • Schools should work closely with LEAs/Consortia to ensure staff are adequately supported, and that additional support in managing workload, wellbeing is easily accessible to all staff (including support workers within schools). • Further professional learning opportunities could also be beneficial in tackling staff anxieties I.e., training on developing confidence with digital/blended learning; effective working practice and working effectively with technology.
Impact on learners	• The online learning model has been an effective method of delivery for some cohorts of pupils and there is a need to consider a more flexible learning model that would enable pupils to become independent learners. This is also in line with the Curriculum for Wales and the purpose to create ambitious, capable learners ready to learn throughout their lives. A consideration should be given to the opportunities for autonomy of learning and choice that pupils reported on as being a positive aspect of blended learning. Curriculum for Wales also 'draws on learner voice and responds to learners' needs, experiences and input. • To increase the level of pupil engagement, digital content should be incorporated into all subject provision to allow for a smoother change in any future pandemics. This would allow schools to integrate cross curriculum skills fully as part of Curriculum for Wales: 'be confident users of a range of technologies to help them function and communicate effectively and make sense of the world.' • Further consideration needs to be given to how schools and children's services communicate during periods of school closure to support vulnerable children and families. Although, schools continued to have a duty of care during this period, as pupils were learning for home this was more difficult to monitor than in a face-to-face setting. • For primary pupils additional support/funding may be necessary to support those who have experienced a transition to another stage of their education during a lockdown or blended learning. In addition, further support may be required for secondary pupils, as they move into the next stage of their education, either GCSEs, Year 12 or college, especially in practical subjects.
Parental Support	• Schools should maintain the regular contact and support provided to families that has developed during lockdown and ensure clarity of expectations. Support for parents should be considered carefully when planning online provision (especially when a high level of parental support is required to complete tasks). In some schools family support posts could be considered to ensure families are supported effectively. However, there are possible financial implications to consider here.

	• Schools should be encouraged to use all possible avenues to engage parents and learners and the increasing use of social media is an option to consider. Further training on effective use of social media may be required, a social media champion should be recognised and use of social media should also be discussed as part of ITE provision. • Training could be offered to parents on new techniques used in schools (specifically maths but also other subjects). This would ensure parents are more confident in supporting their child at home either with online learning or with additional learning activities. This is crucial and especially true if they are supporting the child in a language that is unfamiliar to them. Additional funding may be required from WG to support schools in fulfilling this goal. • A level of bilingual guidance and support is key to ensuring parents of pupils from English medium homes and attending Welsh medium education are adequately supported.

Estyn

Adapting to Change	• Schools should be supported to make autonomous decisions in planning for their learners. Differences in approach should be encouraged and supported as schools adapt to unique and individual needs of learners within the school.
Staff Workload and Wellbeing	• Recognition of the impact on teacher workload and the additional requirements of delivering learning in this way is essential. This must be understood to inform future planning.
Impact on learners	• The online learning model has been and effective method of delivery for some cohorts of pupils and there is a need to consider a more flexible learning model that would enable pupils to become independent learners. This is also in line with the Curriculum for Wales and the purpose to create ambitious, capable learners ready to learn throughout their lives. A consideration should be given to the opportunities for autonomy of learning and choice that pupils reported on as being a positive aspect of blended learning. Curriculum for Wales also draws on learner voice and responds to learners' needs, experiences and input. • To increase the level of pupil engagement, digital content should be incorporated into all subject provision to allow for a smoother change in any future pandemics. This would allow schools to integrate cross curriculum skills fully as part of Curriculum for Wales: 'be confident users of a range of technologies to help them function and communicate effectively and make sense of the world.'
Parental Support	• Schools should maintain the regular contact and support provided to families that has developed during lockdown and ensure clarity of expectations. Support for parents should be considered carefully when planning online provision (especially when a high level of parental support is required to complete tasks). In some schools family support posts could be considered to ensure families are supported effectively. However, there are possible financial implications to consider here. • There is room to consider, a more integrated co-construction approach to learning, going beyond traditional methods of setting homework. This is of particular importance in relation to developing and nurturing Welsh language skills, and most importantly in those contexts where Welsh is not easily accessible outside the home unless opportunities are created as an extension on the school experience.

	• A level of bilingual guidance and support is key to ensuring parents of pupils from Engilsh medium homes and attending Welsh medium education are adequately supported.

Children and Young People's Services

Impact on learners	• Further consideration needs to be given to how schools and children's services communicate during periods of school closure to support vulnerable children and families. Although, schools continued to have a duty of care during this period, as pupils were learning for home this was more difficult to monitor than in a face to face setting.

ITE Providers

10.4   The data from ITE staff and students raised themes that are specific to the sector and link to the research call requirement of considering the implications for ITE in Wales

Adapting to change	• Ensure that strategies for managing change are incorporated into their ITE courses • Evaluate approaches used to deliver ITE through the pandemic and consider the impact on future practice
Developing New teachers	• Consider the pedagogies of blended learning and how this is incorporated into their ITE courses • Provide the Opportunity to work with different learning platforms; • HEIs have a role in developing the blended learning and digital skills of their students and partner schools • Encourage more exploration of the use of different approaches to assessment to support a range of learners and provide feedback remotely • Consideration of different models of blending learning and at home and school
Professional Learning with partnership schools	• The creation of online groups/buddies in supporting staff (especially when teaching remotely). Support networks should continue to be encouraged in schools to ensure teachers, be those trainee teachers, NQTs, experienced staff or senior leaders are adequately supported • HEIs have a role in developing the blended learning and digital skills of their students and partner schools
Working with Children and Young People's services	• Joined up thinking about the use of on-line environments and safeguarding

Conclusion

- There should be recognition of schools ability to adapt to change in preparation for Curriculum for Wales.
- There is a need for a more joined up-approach, between LEAs, consortia and schools as this would ensure support and messages are consistent across Wales
- Consistency of provision and further support for pupils is required in relation to changes in learning patterns and access to appropriate digital devices and internet access to support blended learning.

- Connectivity is key to ensuring all stakeholders within the education sector can engage and perform to the best of their abilities.

10.5   As highlighted by the findings of this report schools, staff, and learners, have responded positively and adapted well to several challenges during the lockdown period(s). We need to ensure their efforts and achievements are recognised and that valuable lessons can be learnt from these experiences.

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'Teachers are amazing.

Children are resilient

Parents & the media should appreciate and respect schools far more than they do.

Teachers can adapt when supported and are more than willing to accept change.'

(Teacher B2)

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