



Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref KW/07548/19

6 December 2019

Dear Sir David

I am writing to you concerning the continued use of outdated and misleading statistics by the Welsh Conservatives concerning expenditure on schools in Wales and a perceived gap in school funding between England and Wales.

This includes occasional references to the last official statistics produced on this matter, dated back to 2010-11 financial year. Some references use unverified and misleading statistics produced by the Teacher's Union NASUWT. I attach a selection of examples whereby the Welsh Conservatives have variously used different figures.

This is a complex area and the changes in school funding arrangements by the UK Government and the rollout of academies and free schools over the last decade have meant it has been difficult to compare expenditure on schools. Welsh Government has not changed its approach and our official statistics on per pupil expenditure have continued to have been published consistently, transparently and openly. Nevertheless, because the data for England were no longer available on a consistent basis, the Chief Statistician made a decision in 2012 to stop producing a comparison of the position with England and hence no new official statistics have been published since then – [this blogs refers](#)¹.

However, more recently the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) have been able to produce new analysis on trends in per pupil expenditure in England and Wales. This used a new data source for England which provided the means for this analysis to be undertaken across maintained schools and academies. The IFS suggest that per pupil funding has fallen faster in England than Wales. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies \(IFS\) annual report on school spending](#)² shows that whilst spending per pupil in Wales is estimated to have fallen by 6% in real-terms between 2009-10 and 2018-19, this is a smaller cut than in England and Northern Ireland. In England spending per pupil has fallen by 8% or more in real-terms, where pupil numbers have risen. As a result the IFS analysis estimates that over the last decade the gap in spending between England and Wales has narrowed.

1

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180412111208/http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/about/user-engagement/chief-statisticians-update/?lang=en>

2 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14344>

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The IFS consulted the Chief Statistician on their approach to this analysis and he advises me that their work is the best possible approach that can be taken to this issue, particularly when considering trends over time. As a result of these discussions, the latest Welsh Government [statistical release on school budgets in Wales](#)³ included a summary of the IFS work.

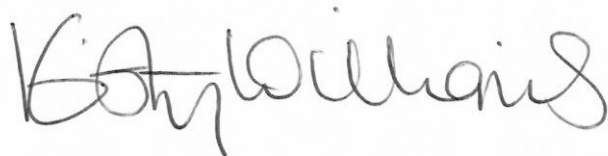
He has also sought a meeting with NASUWT to discuss the figures that I mentioned in the second paragraph, which we hope can help us understand the methodology they have used.

I am as keen as anyone to ensure we have a sound and robust evidence base on per pupil expenditure, and to understand how the financial position of our schools compare with the rest of the UK. This is why I have recently commissioned an urgent review into how much funding is required to fund schools sufficiently in Wales, which will be taken forward independently of government.

The IFS work clearly suggests the gap has narrowed since 2010-11 and as a result it is wholly inappropriate for the Welsh Conservatives to continue to use figures that either pre-date those trends, or in the case of NASUWT data figures that are unverified without transparent methods.

The continued use of these outdated or unverified statistics is having an impact on public debate in Wales at a critical time for public services. I would be grateful for your views on this matter and whether you agree the use of data dating back to 2010-11, or unverified estimates, on this matter should cease.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kirsty Williams', written in a cursive style.

Kirsty Williams AC/AM
Y Gweinidog Addysg
Minister for Education

³ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/local-authority-budgeted-expenditure-on-schools-april-2019-to-march-2020-673.pdf>

Examples of Welsh Conservative use of per pupil spend data

Opposition motion discusses 'spending gap' of £678:

<https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5350#A45411>

Reference to £678 pp gap: <https://www.welshconservatives.com/news/carwyn-says-hes-proud-his-governments-education-record-where-wales-ranks-bottom-all-uk-nations>

<https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5428#A48908>

"There is a spending gap per pupil of nearly £700 between England and Wales, but this spending gap is replicated between local authorities in Wales"

"The pupil spend in Wales, as Mohammad here has pointed out, is nearly £700 less than in England"

<https://record.assembly.wales/Plenary/5854#A53927>

"This money will provide an opportunity for the education Minister to take decisive action to close, if not crush, this £645 per-pupil funding gap between England and Wales."

"The Welsh Government has a long-standing commitment to protect school funding, yet the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers' latest figures estimate the funding gap between pupils in England and Wales to be a staggering £645.

"But, of course, money is only half the answer, and indeed the NASUWT, as my colleague Paul Davies mentioned, has put that funding gap per pupil at £645."

<https://cofnod.cynulliad.cymru/Plenary/4990?lang=en-GB#A44028>

"The school funding crisis in Wales is severe. NASUWT Wales calculates that there is now a £678 funding gap per pupil between England and Wales."

"Now, I'll ask her: does she think spending more than £600 less per pupil in Wales than in England is right or something she and her Government are proud of?"

