

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) i egwyddorion cyffredinol y [Bil Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil \(Cymru\)](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) inquiry into the general principles of the [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Bill](#)

TER 17

Ymateb gan: **Gwasanaeth Addysg yr Eglwys Gatholig**

Response from: **Catholic Education Service (CES)**



Catholic Education Service
Gwasanaeth Addysg Gatholig

1. **Executive Summary**

- This consultation response is being submitted by the Catholic Education Service (CES), an agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
- We broadly welcome the Bill, but have laid out a number of points to consider during the next stage of the Bill process which include topics such as diversity of provision, embracing the Welsh language, equality of opportunity and consulting with the relevant members of the Catholic community.
- Most importantly, we would welcome reassurance that Catholic schools will be able to receive the support required to maintain and consolidate their current levels of provision and that the passing of this Bill will not negatively impact current Catholic post-16 provision in Wales.

2. **Introduction**

The Catholic Education Service (CES) is the education agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Bishops' Conference). The Bishops' Conference is the permanent assembly of all the Catholic Bishops in England and Wales and the CES, as the education agency of the Bishops' Conference, is charged with promoting and securing education on behalf of the Bishops. Across the three Welsh Catholic dioceses, there are 86 providers of Catholic education in Wales at both primary and secondary level serving around 28,500 learners. There are six institutions made up of five 11-18 secondary schools and one further education college that provide post-16 education in Wales. The Catholic community works in partnership with Welsh Government and Local Authorities in its provision of education.

In response to the Draft Tertiary Education and Research Bill (February 2021) and the recommendations of Estyn's thematic review of Post 16 Partnerships (January 2021), the CES Wales Post-16 Development Group was formed in February 2021 with the aim to discuss the future provision of Catholic post-16 education. The group comprises of the headteachers and principal of the Catholic schools with sixth forms and the Catholic sixth form college in Wales. They are supported by the Wales Adviser of the CES and the Diocesan Directors of Education. It is facilitated and supported by independent senior advisors from the Association of Education Advisers.

An agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
Chairman: The Rt Reverend Marcus Stock MA STL, Bishop of Leeds
Director: Paul Barber
Company Number: 4734592 Charity Number: 1097482



3. In support of the Bill

The CES welcomes this Bill and the opportunities it presents for education in Wales. The coherent approach set out within the Bill and the clear layout of the strategic duties is helpful. In particular, it is encouraging to see that the importance of collaboration has been expressed within the Bill.

It is important that the Bill's introduction will take into account the existing pressures placed upon schools and colleges due to the pandemic and the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales. As providers of schools in Wales, we look forward to working with the Welsh Government in implementing the aims of this Bill.

The parameters of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research proposed by the Bill require ongoing dialogue with the Catholic community during and after the passage of the Bill to ensure there are no unintended consequences for Catholic post-16 provision in Wales.

4. Concerns around sixth form closures, diversity of provision and the impact on the local community

Headteachers of Catholic schools have raised concerns that an unintended consequence of the Bill will be the closure of traditional sixth forms in favour of post-16 provision in further education colleges. This would affect diversity of provision and also the lives of the local communities supported by Catholic schools.

A strong Catholic provision will contribute to maintaining the diversity of learner choice at post-16 as well as providing continuity of Catholic education in Wales. We would welcome reassurance from the Commission that Catholic schools will be able to receive the support required to maintain and consolidate their current levels of provision and that the passing of this Bill will not negatively impact current Catholic post-16 provision in Wales.

Often Catholic schools are the hubs of their communities and their outreach contributes to an essential part of community life. If post-16 provision offered by further education colleges was preferred, not only would this cause a narrowing of choice and depth of options available for students, but it would also have a detrimental impact on communities and affect the ability to deliver a 'civic mission'. It is important that this Bill does not negatively impact Catholic schools and their local communities.

The Commission must ensure learners continue to have access to Catholic post-16 provision in Wales in order to preserve the diversity of options for study available for learners. Catholic schools must be supported in maintaining and developing a sustainable post-16 provision for students. It is important that the Commission considers the impact on local communities if proposals for a reorganisation of post-16 provision are brought forward.

5. Embracing the Welsh language

As an agency of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, the CES recognises the important role that education settings have in educating children in the rich and varied history, culture and language of Wales. Catholic schools in Wales are committed to increasing the number learners who are confident Welsh speakers. We will also support staff members who wish to access the Welsh Government sabbatical scheme to improve their Welsh language skills and in turn benefit Welsh language provision in Catholic schools. It is crucial that the Commission ensures Catholic schools receive the necessary support and resources to fulfil the shared aims of the Catholic Church and the Welsh Government in relation to Welsh language.



6. Ensuring equality of opportunity in school provision

It is encouraging that the Bill has a clear focus on meeting the needs of learners who want to continue their studies in a Welsh medium setting. However, the needs of learners who wish to continue their sixth form studies within a church school do not appear to have been given due consideration. Equality of opportunity is paramount for students who wish to access post-16 provision in a church school. The Commission must ensure that parents are able to fulfil their role as the primary educators of their children by enabling them to choose a school for their child, not just based on the language medium of the school but of its religious character.¹

It is also important for there to be access to provision for Catholic students across Wales including in areas where there is no Catholic provision available. There will be a cost to learners in Catholic schools if they are no longer able to access the education of their choice. The Commission must support these students practically and financially to ensure they are able to access the transport required to attend a Catholic school if there is not one local to them.

In conjunction with the Commission's efforts to ensure children can access an education at a Catholic school, the CES is exploring the development of a curriculum model across Welsh Catholic sixth form providers with a national virtual college to support. This model would offer breadth of choice, rationalise teaching in undersubscribed subjects and offer a Catholic dimension to the studies of students who do not have access to a Catholic sixth form using the best practice lessons learnt during the pandemic. However, whilst this initiative will be act as a helpful resource, support from Welsh Government is still essential to ensure children are able to access a Catholic school in-person is not lost.

Including the Catholic Community in Future Consultation

As the provider of all Catholic schools in Wales, the CES expects to work in partnership with the Welsh Government to ensure that both the goals of the Welsh Government and the Catholic Church are met. It is important that the appropriate protections for Catholic education are safeguarded to enable Catholic education in Wales to flourish and continue to form part of the rich tapestry of Welsh culture. There is a requirement for the Commission to consult those it considers appropriate before issuing guidance. We are concerned that insufficient weight will be given to the views of the learners in the Catholic sector given that there is only a single Catholic sixth form college. We would expect that consultation will be wide and include the institutions that will be affected by it as well as the specialised CES Wales Post-16 Development Group. We would also expect that dioceses with any sixth form colleges or schools with sixth forms will be included as consultee



Catholic Education Service
Gwasanaeth Addysg Gatholig