

Written evidence submitted by Becky Bawler

Dear Robert,

As Chair of the Education Select Committee, I am sure you are inundated with letters from teachers across England regarding the education situation at the moment. I do not teach in England but in Wales, however I have many friends who do and I would like to offer you my thoughts on the benefits of adopting a national platform such as the Hwb platform we have in Wales at this time as a way to tackle the growing digital divide.

From my perspective over the bridge, it appears that the Department for Education response has been disorganised and chaotic, leading to increased workload and stress on your teaching workforce, who already were managing a high accountability profession even before this. It appears very unlikely that Covid-19 will be leaving our shores soon and even more important therefore to tackle the digital divide that students and schools find themselves dealing with. I welcomed your cross-party campaign to address this wholeheartedly and thank you for your dedicated action and commitment to disadvantaged children.

I would like to highlight that access to devices would need sufficient support and the benefits Wales have had in this area. A report launched in April ([link below](http://www.ednfoundation.org/2020/04/16/protecting-learning-how-educators-and-parents-are-supporting-student-learning-during-covid-19/)) highlighted amongst other things the importance of providing devices for the most vulnerable and called for a national platform, such as Hwb in Wales and Glow in Scotland. <http://www.ednfoundation.org/2020/04/16/protecting-learning-how-educators-and-parents-are-supporting-student-learning-during-covid-19/>

To the best of my knowledge, neither of these calls have been addressed sufficiently in England and has left yet another potential for schools being reliant on goodwill of business to provide devices as you are aware, or in the case of a platform for learning, relies on schools all having a level of digital technical competence to select and train staff and students on a suitable, paid for solution – of which there are many of varying quality.

The national resources in Oak Academy and BBC Bitesize initiatives cannot be compared to the provision we have here in Wales, which provides both a bank of teacher and student resources, networks for staff to collaborate on, Office 365 and G-Suite, plus Flipgrid and J2E and the Encyclopedia Britannica as standard across all user accounts.

The Hwb platform is constantly reviewed and updated with an accessible team who will listen to suggestions of new apps or software that could be added to it centrally.

The Hwb platform also offers a News repository for curriculum developments and has incorporated the former Learning Wales website and the National Grid for Learning resources. The link below takes you to the public face of Hwb, however as a teacher or student there are a wide range of further resources sitting behind a log in.

<https://hwb.gov.wales/>

The benefits of this system for us in Wales is that from the age of 4, students have a single log in and password which then affords them access to all the above software, each school can assign staff as digital champions who then can reset passwords within their own school

and pupils can take their account with them as they move to other schools until the age of 19. This has enabled schools to save huge sums of money on Office 365 and G-Suite licenses alone and to access training provided by the Hwb team and collaborate with other staff across the nation. All additions to the platform are approved by the national team and are considered on educational merits as well as being considered by the legal team to ensure it fits with our national mission and safeguarding requirements. In reality, this platform has allowed us to start from a position of strength, and whilst not all schools solely use it for their provision, it has meant that, together with our Digital Competence Framework, in Wales were perhaps more cohesively prepared to switch to digital, remote learning than many of my friends in England.

In my own school, a comprehensive school with growing proportion of students living in disadvantage or with additional learning needs, a one-hour Microsoft Teams session was sufficient for all staff to be comfortable enough to go and test out its use to communicate within departments and across the schools, which we have successfully doing since March 20th, because the ground work had been done over the past 2 years and the national Hwb platform supported this competence.

My friends who teach in England have long looked at our national Hwb platform with some degree of envy, no more so than now, as it has afforded us the confidence to know that our students are able to access learning online, leaving us as a nation to consider the issues with those who do not have access to devices and then roll out a national provision for our vulnerable learners including home wi-fi access and providing free of charge devices. We know, from our work with the Digital Competence Framework that our staff and, most importantly, that our students understand online safety and are able to access the Hwb platform which offers a safe and GDPR compliant system. I hope that you will consider this when you meet with the select committee so that students in England are not disadvantaged compared to those lucky enough to be given this opportunity across the bridge, both now in the time of a global pandemic and moving forward into an increasingly digital world.

I would be happy to be contacted, or to link you with members of the Hwb national team should you wish for a more detailed breakdown of the advantages our platform offers and I would urge you to consider this a priority for learners in England.

Regards

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