



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Developments in remote and blended learning practice: government response

Our response to Estyn's report and recommendations on developments in remote and blended learning practice.

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Report title

Developments in remote and blended learning practice in the post-16 sector

Report details

The report provides an overview of how further education colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning in the community partnerships have developed their practice to deliver teaching, training and learning, either as remote or blended learning, from March 2020 to January 2021. The report captures the strengths and on-going challenges that providers and learners face, and it shares cameos of emerging practice. The evidence base for this review draws on interviews, observations and focus groups by Estyn inspectors with learners, tutors, teachers and assessors; which were all carried out remotely.

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Summary of main findings

The pandemic has caused a paradigm shift in teaching and learning in the post-16 sectors. Providers and their staff across all post-16 sectors have focused their priorities on learners and their wellbeing.

While there have been improvements in the quality of teaching and learning through remote and blended learning since the start of the pandemic, the quality of teaching and learning online remains variable overall.

Providers and their staff across all sectors have shown great commitment to developing their skills in remote and blended teaching and assessment. Those providers who had begun to introduce an element of remote or blended teaching and learning into their curriculum offer prior to lockdown in March 2020 were in a stronger position to bring other provision online quickly.

The introduction of remote and blended learning has caused a shift in how providers and staff quality assure online courses and share practice. The greater use of technology enables opportunities for greater reflection on an individual basis and sharing of innovative practice to staff across the provider.

Adult learning in the community partnerships were disadvantaged in bringing adult learning online because in most cases they do not have centralised IT learning support teams, virtual learning environments and access to shared online resources to support planning and delivery to learners, particularly to those learners who are disadvantaged.

It has been more difficult to move some courses and programmes into remote learning than other courses or programmes. This has been particularly the case for learners in the further education and work-based learning sectors undertaking apprenticeships and technical courses, as they need to practise with specialist equipment and in specialist facilities, as well as take supervised assessments to demonstrate occupational or professional competence.

Where staff work in teams to develop remote and blended teaching and learning courses, they are able to share responsibilities, teaching methodology, ideas and resources. This leads in the main to online courses with greater coherence

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and a good balance of purposeful synchronous and asynchronous activities that promote learning.

Providers have noted unexpected benefits to taking courses online. For example, the greater flexibility attracts a wider range of learners, as they are able to access learning more easily.

In the further education and adult learning in the community sectors, providers have adjusted their curriculum offer quickly and appropriately to meet the needs of learners who have lost employment and need to reskill to access the job market.

Despite their efforts to develop remote and blended learning and assessment methods, providers consider that in too many cases awarding organisations were not agile enough in adapting their requirements. This has left too many learners waiting to complete their qualifications and receive their awards in the academic year 2020 to 2021. In many cases, this has demoralised learners, and left them unable to make progress in the jobs they are in or unable to apply for jobs related to their qualifications.

Recommendations for learning providers

Recommendation 1

FE colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning partnerships should quality assure remote and blended learning provision to ensure that all courses or programmes meet a minimum quality standard so as to reduce the variability in provision.

Recommendation 2

FE colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning partnerships should ensure that leaders and teachers have access to professional learning that supports the development of how to design effective remote and blended

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teaching and learning, as well as further develop teachers' pedagogical and assessment skills.

Recommendation 3

FE colleges, work-based learning providers and adult learning partnerships should share emerging and innovative remote and blended learning practice within and across post-16 sectors in Wales and beyond.

Welsh Government response to recommendations for learning providers

The Welsh Government will work with learning providers and key stakeholders to make sure that they are aware of these recommendations. Welsh Government's grant funding investment will continue to support post-16 learning providers to continue developing a high quality and more consistent standard of remote and blended teaching and learning delivery, through the provision of professional development opportunities, enabling the sector in Wales to benefit from the rapidly growing wider research and evidence base, and promoting good practice.

The Welsh Government has already funded professional development activities for the FE, WBL and ACL sectors in 2020 to 2021, and has worked with representatives from the Post-16 sector and key stakeholders to produce **blended learning guidance** for learning providers and teaching practitioners. Any further guidance or support developed during the coming months, and in preparation for the next academic year, will take account of the results of various studies and surveys which are due to be published, and relevant examples of emerging and good practice identified by Estyn and Jisc.

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Recommendations for Welsh Government

Recommendation 4

The Welsh Government should continue to support the sector with guidance to enable providers to develop quality remote and blended approaches, particularly in supporting the return to direct teaching and training and the assessment of practical vocational and technical skills.

Welsh Government Response

Working with sector and stakeholder representatives on the Blended Learning Working Group (under our Covid-19 Resilience Plan for the Post-16 sector), the Welsh Government has developed **guidance on blended learning** and signposted free online **professional development material** for sector staff.

Any further guidance or support materials developed during the coming months will take account of the results of various studies and surveys which are due to be published. We will also work closely with the sector to ensure that any further resources will add sufficient value to guidance that already exists, and to integrate resources produced by the sector as part of existing funded programmes on professional learning and digital delivery.

Recommendation 5

The Welsh Government should commission professional learning for the post-16 sector, which is free to providers and helps them to develop specific expertise in remote and blended learning design, teaching, training and learning for their sector to reduce variability of quality in provision.

Welsh Government Response

The Welsh Government has invested £5 million in supporting institutional and collaborative professional development activities in the FE sector during 2020 to

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2021. This support will continue in 2021 to 2022.

The Welsh Government has funded professional learning activities for adult learning providers in 2020 to 2021, and the design and delivery of a pilot digital pedagogy course for WBL practitioners (by Jisc).

Welsh Government funding to Jisc is supporting a number of professional development activities in 2020 to 2021 including funded places on Jisc training courses (currently delivered online) and ‘community of practice’ based sharing of information and good practice. Relevant Jisc training courses include digital leadership and designing ‘built in’ opportunities for learners to develop digital capabilities as part of their course, module or unit of learning.

We are looking at how to build on and continue this support in 2021 to 2022.

Recommendation 6

The Welsh Government should enable adult learning in the community partnerships and learners to access a national centralised digital platform to provide remote and blended learning more easily.

Welsh Government Response

The Welsh Government has commissioned Jisc to undertake a ‘State of the Nation’ study on the IT and digital infrastructure in the post-16 sector in Wales. As part of this study, we have asked Jisc to explore the adult learning sector’s needs, in relation to the digital delivery of teaching and learning, in more detail.

Recommendation 7

The Welsh Government should encourage and support providers to share emerging practice in remote and blended learning within and across post-16 sectors in Wales.

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Welsh Government Response

Welsh Government annual grant funding to Jisc supports this type of activity. There is a range of provider and stakeholder networks, including the Digital 2030 steering group and FE Digital Vision group, which can be used to disseminate good practice and experiences of remote and blended learning. In addition, the rollout of Hwb accounts to post-16 provider staff will enhance practitioners' and leaders' ability to share information and resources sector-wide.

Publication details

Estyn propose to publish this review on or after 23 March 2021.

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