



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

REPORT

Post-16 partnerships: government response

Our response to Estyn's report and recommendations on Post-16 partnerships - shared planning and provision between schools, and between schools and colleges.

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Report title

'Estyn Thematic Review - Recommendations: Post-16 partnerships - Shared planning and provision between schools, and between schools and colleges'

Report details

The Estyn Thematic Review of Post 16 Partnerships is written in response to a request for advice in the Minister for Education's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2019 to 2020. It reports on strategic planning and partnership working for the education of 16 to 19 year olds in school sixth forms and further education colleges. It provides an overview of the way that school sixth forms work with each other, and with further education colleges, to support learners to study the post-16 courses that best meet their needs and abilities. It is the latest in a series of Estyn thematic reviews on 16-19 provision in school sixth forms and further education colleges.

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Summary of main findings

Strategic planning and leadership

The majority of colleges and local authorities communicate well with each other. They share their plans and work together appropriately to evaluate the impacts of these plans on schools and colleges in the area. In a minority of cases, local authorities and regional consortia on the one hand, and colleges on the other, do not engage with each other sufficiently well. In too many cases, school and college leaders' planning does not consider the wider community of local schools and colleges, and the broader cohort of learners, well enough.

A majority of senior leaders in schools with sixth forms report that the relationship with their local colleges is generally not as strong as with other schools. Senior leaders within colleges also acknowledge that this is an issue between colleges and a minority of schools across Wales. They report a sense of competition and lack of transparency and trust between the two sectors. In a few cases, similar tensions exist between schools.

In a few cases, differing planning, funding and oversight regimes impede productive partnerships between providers. Such administrative boundaries arise between schools in different local authorities, as well as between the school and college sectors. As a result, a few providers that are well placed to work together do not collaborate due to the differing regimes under which they operate.

Providers and local authorities do not use the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure 2009 to guide their strategic planning at post-16 sufficiently well. A minority of school leaders are not confident that the offer available to their learners meets the requirements of the measure. Local and national government processes for ensuring that providers meet the requirements have become less effective over recent years. As a result, compliance with the measure is monitored inconsistently across Wales and, currently, it is unclear how many learners have access to a sufficiently broad curriculum offer at post-16.

Over recent years, several local authorities have carried out worthwhile reviews

of local sixth form provision that result in useful strategic recommendations for improvements. In a few cases, schools, colleges and local authorities do not work together to respond to these recommendations well enough. This allows weak or inefficient aspects of post-16 provision to persist.

Many providers work effectively with each other to share post-16 provision where learners from different providers come together to form merged teaching groups. This helps to secure a greater choice of courses for sixth form learners and to reduce operational costs. In a few cases, senior leaders draw on subject specialists from partner providers to help improve the quality of teaching. For example, providers exchange responsibility for the delivery of specific courses in order to improve the learning experience. A few providers invite subject specialists from other schools or colleges to help support and improve their subject departments.

A majority of leaders have a sound understanding of the performance of courses delivered to their learners by other providers. They access each other's evaluations of lessons and records of learners' progress over time, and also gather learners' views about their lessons. The overall effectiveness of improvement processes for shared provision is inconsistent across Wales and, in a minority of cases, leaders do not have robust quality assurance arrangements in place.

The majority of designated Welsh-medium schools share post-16 provision through small partnerships that are led by the providers themselves. In many cases, neighbouring schools maintain strong working relationships. To overcome the long distances between them, a few providers share provision using video links between each other's lessons. Many subject teachers who deliver sixth form lessons through the medium of Welsh collaborate well to develop and share teaching and learning resources written in Welsh. However, colleges and Welsh-medium schools generally find it difficult to collaborate to help learners pursue elements of vocational courses through the medium of Welsh.

Partnership working

Across Wales, a third of secondary phase schools are part of consolidated

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arrangements, having no sixth form at the schools themselves. Eight per cent have their own sixth form and do not share any provision with other schools or colleges. The remaining 59% of schools have sixth forms and report that they are part of post-16 partnerships of some kind. Two of the 12 further education colleges in Wales, Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Bridgend College, play significant roles in post-16 partnership networks together with local schools. Bridgend College also works with neighbouring Pencoed Comprehensive School to jointly operate a sixth form centre.

As part of their annual post-16 data submissions, schools that make use of shared provision should submit information about the provider of each course that their learners undertake. Overall, schools across Wales under-report the extent of this shared provision. This limits the Welsh Government's ability to monitor the extent of such provision and the outcomes achieved by the groups of learners taking part.

Most school sixth forms that share provision, transport learners between them to attend lessons; a very few schools use remote learning arrangements instead. In both cases, shared provision arrangements are often informal and lack written agreements that set out roles and responsibilities clearly.

Many schools present learners with a broad choice of sixth form study options. However, in 2018 to 2019, 25% of schools had learners studying across a more limited range of 25 sixth form courses or fewer. Most learners attending school sixth forms report that they were able to choose the subjects that they wanted to study, but a few did not have access to less popular subjects that were of interest to them, for example politics or economics.

Senior leaders in schools, local authorities and regional consortia ensure that the majority of school sixth form teachers and middle leaders undertake professional learning activities alongside their peers from other schools. Between colleges, most networking activity involves senior leaders, who meet their peers from across Wales regularly. However, only a few providers work together to support professional learning between schools and colleges, even where they have staff undertaking similar roles. In a majority of cases, colleges, regional consortia and local authorities do not communicate, or work together well enough, to develop these opportunities.

Supporting learner transition to post-16 education

Many schools provide learners with suitable information about the options available to them once they complete Year 11. In a few schools, learners benefit from a comprehensive range of activities to help them learn about, and decide between, their post-16 options at all local providers. This includes opportunities to meet representatives from other local post-16 providers, including work-based learning providers as well as schools and colleges.

Many learners value the advice and guidance they receive whilst at school. A minority feel that advice from schools does not address alternative pathways to A level study sufficiently, and that staff members often focus on encouraging learners to progress to the school's own sixth form. Learners feel that post-16 providers, including schools and colleges, do not share enough information about the quality of their provision and the outcomes achieved by their learners.

Many school sixth forms and colleges see the number of learner enrolments as a high priority. Leaders of small sixth forms often feel under financial pressure to ensure that Year 11 learners progress to their sixth form. In a minority of cases, this leads senior and middle leaders to limit the promotion of alternatives. In a few cases, school leaders do not invite other providers to discuss their post-16 provision with Year 11 learners in a comprehensive way.

The majority of providers do not share information on individual learners to support their transition when they transfer to another school or college. Few providers follow the Welsh Government's guidance on 'Effective post-16 transitions and data sharing' (Welsh Government, 2019) successfully.

Most schools that do not have their own sixth form, provide learners with impartial information about the full range of progression options available to them. Learners benefit from regular interaction with local post-16 providers, both schools and colleges, to learn about the courses on offer and to discuss their aspirations. In a minority of cases, these schools ensure that learners also interact with providers of work-based learning provision. Many have effective transition arrangements that are supported by helpful dialogue between school staff members who know individual learners well and representatives of the

post-16 providers.

Recommendation 1

Schools and colleges should:

- ensure strong partnership working to develop collaborative provision with other providers where this helps to improve quality or expand choice

Recommendation 2

Schools and colleges should:

- ensure that post-16 provision delivered in partnership with other providers is underpinned by written agreements of responsibilities, and is included fully within improvement planning processes

Welsh Government response to recommendation 1 and 2

Welsh Government supports recommendations 1 and 2:

- work with Estyn and the sector to develop a framework and guidance which underpins collaborative planning including a requirement for schools and colleges to demonstrate collective responsibility and partnership working in the development and promotion of a jointly planned curriculum offer where this doesn't exist

Recommendation 3

Schools and colleges should:

- ensure that advice and guidance to learners is impartial, focussed on learners' needs, and informed by the provision, standards and support available at all local post-16 education and training providers

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government supports the recommendation:

- Careers Wales, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh government, provides a bilingual, inclusive, impartial career guidance and coaching service for the people of Wales.

On 14 January 2021, the Minister for Education agreed to Careers Wales taking forward the development of a new Quality Award for good careers guidance in schools and process for rolling out across Wales.

In line with the new School Improvement Guidance: Framework for Evaluation, Improvement and Accountability (currently in consultation), the Welsh Government will work closely with Careers Wales to develop a new framework which will support schools to drive up the quality of their Careers Work Related Experience (CWRE) provision across their school.

The framework will be developed in line with the new CWRE Guidance and Estyn's new National Framework. The Framework will include raising learner's awareness of their full range of opportunities and how to access them.

Initially the framework will provide a self-assessment toolkit that will enable schools to assess their current provision and develop an improvement plan for CWRE. Careers Wales will then develop a Careers Wales Quality Award that education providers can then work towards.

Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) is one of the cross-cutting themes in the new Curriculum for Wales for 3 to 16 year olds which will be implemented in schools and settings from September 2022. The Curriculum for Wales guidance was issued in January 2020 to support schools and practitioners in designing their curriculum, including opportunities for learning for CWRE across the curriculum.

To help schools in understanding CWRE in the design and implementation of

their curricula, the Minister for Education agreed for additional statutory guidance to be produced for CWRE.

The guidance is currently being drafted by practitioners from secondary, primary and special schools, with the support of experts. It will provide an overview of the importance of CWRE, supporting schools in designing their curriculum with advice and support on areas such as employee engagement. The Welsh Government intends to consult on the draft guidance in May with a view to publishing refined guidance as part of the Curriculum for Wales framework at the end of 2021

Recommendation 4

Schools and Colleges should:

- share information to support the transition or transfer of learners to post-16 education in line with Welsh Government guidance

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government supports the recommendation:

- the guidance on information sharing when learner's progress from school to post-16 is being refreshed to include the new data sharing code of practice from the Information Commissioners Office. The guidance will be reissued to schools, colleges, local authorities and regional consortia and we will encourage providers to put formal arrangements in place where possible, and report any data requests that are refused

Recommendation 5

Schools and colleges should:

- submit accurate information about the programmes learners undertake, including the provider of each learning activity, as part of their annual data

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submissions to the Welsh Government

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government supports the recommendation:

- both data collections for schools and colleges include fields to identify where learning is being delivered and so the extent of partnership arrangements. This field is not currently used in any monitoring to analyse the extent of partnership working. There are limitations with this data, as the schools data collection is retrospective and therefore will not be available until December after the end of the academic year. Welsh Government will undertake to review data in this field to capture issues for action by schools and colleges

Recommendation 6

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- ensure that strategic planning involves the wider community of local schools and colleges

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government supports the recommendation:

- the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure ensures that schools and colleges must offer a Local Curriculum offer which ensures a minimum of 30 choices for learners including at least 5 vocational courses. Schools and colleges are encouraged to co-operate in the development of the local curriculum. Regional consortia and Local Authorities are currently obliged, through the terms of their grant funding from Welsh Government, to ensure that schools meet these requirements. Welsh Government will update the terms of the grant from 2021 to 2022 onwards to specify that strategic planning involves the wider community of local schools and colleges

Recommendation 7

Local authorities and regional consortia should:

- work together with colleges on joint professional learning activities where appropriate

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government supports the recommendation:

- the Post-16 Workforce Development project aims to develop a collaborative approach across all providers within the sector to support the development of professional learning for staff at all levels. This work will culminate in a Post-16 Workforce Development Framework in March 2023

Recommendation 8

Local Authorities and regional consortia should:

- work with colleges to ensure that a suitable range of post-16 provision is available locally through the medium of Welsh

Welsh Government response

Welsh Government supports the recommendation:

- local authorities must prepare Welsh in Education Strategic Plans which require them to work collaboratively, where necessary, with other schools and further education institutions to increase Welsh-medium education provision, improve language acquisition and support learner progression at every stage of their statutory education creating a greater demand for post-16 learning in line with Cymraeg 2050.

To improve the infrastructure and provision available, the Coleg Cymraeg

Cenedlaethol's Further Education and Apprenticeship Welsh-medium Action Plan specifies short, medium and long term actions to improve linguistic continuity into vocational education and training post-16. These actions range from working strategically with partners that have responsibilities for the infrastructure of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision to supporting colleges and training providers to improve the range of provision available for learners.

Welsh-medium and bilingual education and training will flow through most of the recommendations, and mainstreaming the Welsh language as a medium of learning and as a workplace skill will require careful consideration within the underpinning structures of this report

Recommendation 9

The Welsh Government should:

- review and consolidate legislation, policy and guidance for 16-19 provision to ensure consistency and clarity of expectations in a way that builds on the developments of Curriculum for Wales

Welsh Government response: accept

- The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill once enacted will repeal the local curricula arrangements currently in place for learners aged 14-16 and introduce a new Curriculum for Wales for all learners aged 3-16. The reform of the compulsory school age curriculum provides an opportunity to review the current curriculum requirements and learning pathways for learners aged 16–19. We will work closely with the post compulsory sector, our external partners and learners to undertake a policy review and amend the statutory curriculum requirements and entitlements for learners aged 16–19 as appropriate to support a continuum of learning post 16.

Recommendation 10

The Welsh Government should:

- apply a consistent approach to the oversight and quality monitoring of post-16 provision, including planning and funding considerations

Welsh Government response: accept

- Much progress has been made in recent years to develop a consistent approach to post 16 planning and funding across post 16 including school sixth form, FEIs and the adult learning network. Welsh Government will review our approach and work with the sector to identify areas for improvement.

Recommendation 11

The Welsh Government should:

- provide prospective learners and their parents with clear information about learner progress and outcomes for school sixth forms and further education colleges in Wales

Welsh Government response: accept

- Post-16 Choices is an online portal similar to My Local School that is being developed so that learners, parents and carers, employers and other interested parties can have access to detailed information on provider, programme and course outcomes and school and college level. This has been put on hold due to COVID-19, but we are about to restart the evaluation of the performance measures which includes a focus on presenting the contextualised measures that are clear and comprehensible to users of the data, including learners and parents.

Recommendation 12

The Welsh Government should:

- ensure that any future Commission for Tertiary Education and Research addresses the findings and recommendations of this thematic review

Welsh Government response: accept

- The draft Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Bill, subject to introduction and enactment, will establish a future Commission for Tertiary Education and Research. The Commission will provide a strong governance framework and be responsible for funding, the strategic oversight and regulation of tertiary education provision in Wales (including securing the proper facilities for education and training for learners up to age 19).

Publication details

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