



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

# Renew and Reform Programme – Post-16 and Transitions Project Support Initiatives: integrated impact assessment

An assessment of how the Renew and Reform Programme – Post-16 and Transitions Project Support Initiatives impacts on learners as a result of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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# What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?

This Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) provides indication of the impact of five post-16 policy initiatives that are at various stages to support learners in particular cohorts in a joined-up way across Welsh Government. They will be financed by the second tranche of the Renew and Reform programme as a response to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on learners. As well as being transition policies to support recovery from the pandemic, these have to be understood in the context of the Young Persons Guarantee (YPG) with the potential to being made more permanent beyond the immediate pandemic recovery. The YPG is a Welsh government commitment to provide everyone under the age of 25 with support to gain a place in education or training, and help to get into work or self-employment. This includes new user-friendly services to help young people find opportunities more easily. The programme will help ensure there is no 'lost generation' in Wales following the COVID-19 pandemic. It is subject to a separate IIA.

This IIA will examine the following five interventions:

- University ready
- Net zero Wales
- Alumni networks
- Tailored work Experience
- Welsh medium vocational seminars

All post-16 learners (in further education and school sixth-forms, higher education and work-based learning and adult learning) are in scope, but individual initiatives typically focus on a specific sub-cohort of post-16 learners.

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## University Ready

The **University Ready hub** is a bilingual platform providing a suite of free resources for students in Wales who are curious about or starting university. The hub is hosted on the Open University's OpenLearn platform and contains hundreds of unique resources created and compiled by Wales' universities. Resources include videos, podcasts, articles, short interactives, and online courses that will provide guidance for post-16 learners considering or making the transition into Higher Education. The resources are intended to help students whose learning has been disrupted by the pandemic to prepare for the transition to university life. Topics include study skills, health and wellbeing support, and introductions to specific subjects and areas of academic study. The project is funded by Welsh Government and coordinated by The Open University in Wales on behalf of all nine universities in Wales.

## Net Zero Wales online learning module

In line with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2016) (WFG Act) and the Net Zero Wales emission reduction plan, there is an obligation to ensure that the response to the climate emergency permeates everything that Welsh Government does. The Net Zero Wales online learning module is an initiative to raise awareness of the implications of climate change and how to achieve a Net Zero Wales.

The move to online learning during the pandemic provided some continuity of learning, however, this was varied and access to high quality, well planned digital learning material will be essential to ensure future continuity of learning. This work has been piloted and has been identified as an area of work which can provide a blueprint for future digital skills modules. This work aligns strongly with the FEAD digital review team and the learning and experience from this pilot has been shared with FEAD and schools' colleagues.

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## Alumni networks

Building on research highlighting the benefits to students of employer engagement in schools, Careers Wales set up a pilot to test the feasibility and effectiveness of secondary comprehensive schools establishing and maintaining their own community of alumni with the aim of motivating and inspiring pupils, challenging stereotypes related to background and raising aspirations through using role models who attended the same school. This assumes that alumni who have experienced similar barriers to current students will make them even more valuable role models as they will be committed to supporting the school and their input will be relatable and sustainable.

A toolkit has been developed to support schools establish and maintain an alumni community. Careers Wales will support schools to recruit alumni using social media campaigns and record interested students on the Educational Business Exchange database. When alumni respond to the campaigns, they will be informed that it is an expression of interest only and that participation in the scheme is at the discretion of each individual school (many schools already have well developed alumni networks, and this project will aim to enhance that work, but it is also acknowledged that some schools may not wish to develop an alumni community). Careers Wales will also work more intensively with a small number of schools (25 – to include at least 1 Welsh medium school and 1 to 2 special schools) across Wales, providing them with bespoke support to establish an alumni community, organising events and activities and developing resources that will help to promote strong relationships between learners and alumni.

## Tailored Work Experience

One of the most significant policy developments of the last Senedd term has been legislation and development work to reform the school curriculum. Long-term there is a clear link between the curriculum and tackling young people who

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are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The four purposes of the curriculum will all have a long-term impact on the capabilities of young people to access opportunities for training, education, and good quality work. The purposes of the new curriculum are:

- a) ambitious capable learners ready to learn through life
- b) enterprising, creative contributors ready to play a full part in life and work
- c) ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world
- d) healthy, confident individuals who are ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

In addition to this long-term, positive impact for learners, there is also the potential for the specific benefit from the introduction of the Careers and Work-Related Experience. This element of the new curriculum offer, and the associated professional learning for teaching staff, will be important parts of ensuring young people at risk of becoming NEET are given appropriate work experience and robust, impartial careers advice and guidance in school and through transition at 16 to post compulsory education and training settings. This may require more intensive support for young people at risk.

The tailored work experience pilot, delivered by Careers Wales will support learners who have struggled to re-engage with their education following the disruption caused by the pandemic. For 2022 to 2023, the service will be made available to 500 pupils across Wales. They will be supported to engage with a programme of regular work (broadly two-days a week or equivalent) in a sector that aligns with their interests, aspirations and personal attributes whilst undertaking a package of core GCSE studies at school.

## Welsh Medium Vocational Seminars

In many parts of Wales, the opportunities for learners to pursue post-16

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vocational studies in Welsh are very limited. This is because the range of vocational subjects that Welsh medium school sixth forms are able to offer, is very restricted, and FE colleges often do not have the Welsh speaking subject specialists available to provide a wide range of provision bilingually. The Welsh medium vocational seminars initiative, delivered by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, aims to cater for Welsh speaking learners who, in order to pursue their chosen vocational pathways, have progressed to FE colleges where they are often part of a very small minority of first language speakers. The aim is to improve their ability and confidence to work in Welsh whilst developing their subject knowledge. This should improve their employment prospects as well as helping them to feel connected to other Welsh speakers who are studying the same courses across Wales.

The initiative is piloting a series of subject seminars bringing together Welsh speaking vocational learners from across Wales, under the guidance of Welsh speaking subject specialist tutors across two different vocational areas. It offers the opportunity to learn about, and discuss, their vocational subjects in Welsh. Sessions are in the form of regular online seminars and could involve subject specific group discussions, consideration of interesting case studies, and/or learners presenting and discussing their project ideas with each other as well as 'lesson' type activity. Guest speakers from industry will be invited to speak about careers or cutting-edge practice in the field. Sessions would be flexible under the guidance of a vocational specialist teacher/lecturer/tutor who is able to deliver through the medium of Welsh.

This initiative is being delivered across Welsh Government with the Welsh Language team leading in the delivery and monitoring of the pilot. If the evaluation shows that the pilot has been successful in delivering better outcomes for young Welsh speaking learners, the intention is to expand delivery into other subject areas.

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## Collaboration

The initiatives have been developed in close collaboration with post-16 provider institutions and Careers Wales who will be delivering them.

## Integration

The proposals are in line with the **Well-being of Future Generations Act**. The Welsh Government is working to achieve a vision of a **prosperous Wales** through the development of an inclusive and fair economy which spreads opportunity and tackles inequality. The disruption to qualifications in the past two academic years means learners preparing for qualifications in this academic year may need support to help their confidence and preparation. An important priority over the next academic year will be working across the education sector to support learners preparing for these qualifications and to enable their **transition to their next steps**.

The Welsh Medium Vocational Language proposal aims at meeting the well-being goal of a thriving Welsh language. Targeted support through the Tailored Work Experience would contribute to a more equal Wales while especially the Net Zero Wales online modules have the potential to foster a resilient Wales.

## Involvement

The Renew and Reform programme set out a clear focus on measures to support learning and well-being of learners and staff with a considered intention to evolve iteratively with ongoing impacts identified by continuing research. Engaging with children and young people, the profession and partners, we will continue to co-develop an integrated package of funded initiatives to support all learners in both their wellbeing and progression in learning as well as workforce

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wellbeing. We will continue the education reform journey in Wales, using the learning of COVID-19 as an opportunity to further improve and develop the post-16 education systems' resilience, readiness and flexibility for long term future challenges.

## Long term and prevention

Despite progress in reducing the number of **young people in Wales who are NEET before the pandemic**, those in the 16-24 age-group still have the **lowest age-related employment rates** and these have decreased since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognise that young people often experience difficulty in engaging sustainably in Education, Employment or Training and that a variety of support is required (**Working Futures 2014-2024, Evidence Report 100, UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2016)**).

Skills and qualifications are among the most important factors impacting on people's chance of being in employment and on their income (Paull, G. and Patel, T. (2012) **An international review of skills, jobs and poverty**. York: JRF; Taylor, M., Haux, T. and Pudney, S. (2012) **Can improving UK skills levels reduce UK poverty and income inequality by 2020**, York: JRF.). Based on experience of previous recessions concerns have been raised about the scarring effect of recessions on young people, particularly those graduating/entering the labour market for the first time. Disrupted school and labour market transitions tend to **compound existing inequalities and harm long term labour market prospects**. Easing transitions and reducing the risk of becoming NEET has therefore a preventative function and the potential to save costs long term.

Learners in post-16 and transition, where progression to their next phase is a key concern for these learners as well as their longer-term employability and skills, will have experienced particular and significant pressures and uncertainty. Therefore, mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 on learners at key transition

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points, in particular GCSE and level 3 studies, is important to ensure that these impacts do not limit learners' futures and prospects. Welsh Government is committed that young people most in need are receiving bespoke personalised support to enable them to transition.

## **Alignment with the Programme for Government and application of the five ways of working**

The above initiatives will continue our **long-term programme of education reform**, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise. The Renew and Reform programme is weighted towards schools with larger numbers of disadvantaged and vulnerable learners to ensure wellbeing and learning support is available (Further Education learners tend to be more likely to be living in deprived areas. The more deprived areas are, the higher the percentage of Further Education learners living there. Data from Ad-hoc statistical requests 19 November 2021 **Unique learners in post-16 learning by deprivation decile, academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20**). A range of bespoke support measures, for example, additional support for Welsh-medium learners in English-speaking communities will be in place. We continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on Welsh medium education and aim to support the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol's work to develop more Welsh medium study opportunities for learners.

We will identify the learners in greatest need and develop support for them in line with the five principles of working stipulated by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The five ways of working have been integral to the initial development of the programme. We will continue to apply the positive lessons of co-production developed through the new curriculum throughout the delivery of this programme. We will do this in close collaboration with our partners, the profession, and the wider education sector as we build on these foundations. The project has identified its key stakeholders and initial

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collaborative work is underway to design and implement the support initiatives. Further stakeholder activity will ensure engagement with representatives across the full range of people impacted by the project's work, with learners themselves being key to the engagement strategy. The Renew & Reform Post-16 and Transitions project was established to ensure cross-departmental, cross-sector and cross-government working. This includes a close working relationship with the Education Directorate to ensure a co-ordinated approach towards learner progression, outcomes and wellbeing which aligns with the Young People's Plan and Well-being of Future Generations Act.

The **evidence suggests** that the impacts of the pandemic are different for different groups of learners. As such, a priority was to listen to young people to develop a greater understanding of the existing and emerging issues they face. It is an integral element of the Welsh Government's Young People's Plan for all policy development regarding the lives of children and young people to listen to, talk to and respond to children and young people when we make decision that affect their lives.

The project team is taking a harms-based approach, using a Children's Rights Impact Assessment against each workstream to ensure work aligns to the evidence and can have a direct impact on supporting young people as they recover from the impacts of the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) imposed on their lives during the peak of the pandemic.

Over the past year, Welsh Government scrutiny of the **educational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** on children and young people has focused on the immediate to short-term effort to re-open schools. The focus of future work will be on the medium to long-term impacts of the pandemic and on measures of recovery and future resilience.

The project team has carried out a series of engagement sessions with learners, but there are lessons learnt which indicate a need for wider cross-government approaches to maximising the impact of our conversations with young people to

ensure we are able to engage appropriately with a diverse range of young people to discuss the topics which matter to them and will enable meaningful discussion. The team are engaging with the Children and Families Division to establish a longer-term approach to capturing the voice of young people.

With a move to 'business as usual' (BAU) there is a risk that there is not significant capacity in existing teams. The additional focus and resources in a specific project team have enabled to develop initiatives in a short space of time and due to changes in resources the workload for the remaining team members has increased, leaving little capacity to take on additional responsibilities in BAU Team structures. On the positive side, moving to BAU ensures an embedding of the approach within all future delivery and makes it independent of separate dedicated funding streams.

## Impact

An overwhelming amount of evidence suggests the impact of the pandemic on children and young people has been harmful and the full impact will not be known for generations. A survey from September/October 2020 found those aged 16-25 having experienced worse labour market outcomes during and after lockdown. The same survey reports that university students from the lowest income backgrounds lost more teaching hours as a result of lockdown than those from higher income groups. Female students reported worse wellbeing impacts from the pandemic than males. Compared to state school pupils, almost double the proportion of private school pupils were benefitting from full school days (Major, L.E., Eyles, A. and Machin, S. (2020) **Generation COVID: Emerging work and education inequalities**. LSE/CEP briefing paper). Although the full impacts of COVID-19 on learners and teachers are not yet clear, it is likely that they will amplify pre-existing inequalities across education in Wales, create new ones and potentially impact the long-term prospects of learners (Education Endowment Foundation (2022) **The impact of Covid-19 on Learning: A review of the evidence**). The development of the programme has

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reflected the impacts that current evidence has outlined, recognising the need to support different groups of learners in the appropriate way. As the support initiatives are developed, impacts will be thoroughly assessed throughout the process and regular engagement with key stakeholders will be a priority to help us ensure that a breadth and depth of impacts for individual projects are carefully considered.

We will continue to assess the impact of the current Welsh Government suite of programmes and their alignment with the priorities of the Programme for Government. There will be a particular focus on ensuring that the needs of those with protected characteristics and shared protected characteristics are met and that any barriers to accessing training or support are identified and mitigated against, thus ensuring that these learners are prioritised for support. We will develop further actions to mitigate any gaps; including reviewing incentives and intervention rates to aid the recruitment of disadvantaged people into the labour market.

## Costs and Savings

**Table 1: Costs of the tranche 2 initiatives of the Renew and Reform programme**

	Allocated budget £
Net Zero Wales	2,000,000
University Ready	210,500
Tailored WEX	518,000

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	<b>Allocated budget £</b>
Alumni networks	50,600
Welsh Vocational Seminars	25,000
Total	2,804,100

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There are very few dedicated resources delivering the project and a review of workloads has identified the priority workstreams and areas of work needed to make a difference to young people impacted by the pandemic as set out in the evidence and research.

As and when resources and workloads transition to 'business as usual' or to the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER), there may be opportunities for the resources to provide a level of resilience in other teams and enable integration of the recovery projects into longer term future policy, the workload associated with the project would remain, especially in relation to the need to evaluate and examine the impacts of the pandemic on children and young people. We therefore need to be collecting data on the impacts and evaluating our policies to determine what we need to do as policy makers in the future. Emerging evidence will inform future practice and BAU and the Commission will consider the evaluation outcomes to deliver for learners and young people in the future.

## **Mechanism**

The Welsh Government already has the powers necessary to undertake this work. No additional legislation is proposed. These are pilot initiatives to mitigate some of the pandemic effects on learners with the potential to be established

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more permanently in future.

## Conclusion

The initiatives are continuing the long-term programme of education reform, and ensure educational inequalities narrow and standards rise.

The Government is committed to:

- ensuring ‘nobody in Wales is left behind after the coronavirus pandemic, and repairing the damage done over the last year’.
- ‘work with children and young people, their families and the education workforce to ensure the best outcomes for learners, particularly the most vulnerable’.

COVID-19 has had profound impact on learning experiences and opportunities for all learners across Wales. With widespread disruption to in-person teaching and variability in access and quality of online provision provided across schools, research shows that learning lost during this time is not only significant but will most acutely affect those from marginalised communities (IFS Briefing Note BN288 (2020). [Learning during lockdown: real-time data on children’s experiences during home learning](#); Welsh Government Statistics (2022). [Outcomes for learners in post-16 education affected by the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic: August 2020 to July 2021](#)).

As outlined above, the evidence suggests that the pandemic has affected some groups of learners more than others. The pandemic has also highlighted disadvantages for some groups of learners at key post-16 transition points.

We will work to use our collective learning over the pandemic to build an educational system that is fit for the future and resilient to tomorrow’s

challenges. We aim to ensure coherence and continuity between existing policy and new initiatives to provide a clear learner-centred approach to support, across different cohorts along a learners' educational journey.

- Improved wellbeing for learners and staff
- Improved learning progress and personal development
- Greater equity between learners from economically or otherwise disadvantaged families and their peers
- Stakeholder confidence

Through co-construction, the projects aim to ensure that inequalities do not widen further and that the adverse effects of the pandemic on the learner cohort are being addressed. We will continue with the implementation and evaluation of these measures, as well as develop further support measures in collaboration with stakeholders – both internal and external.

We will plan, trial, review and refine and mainstream policy that works.

In conclusion, the range of evidence considered reveals that learners are likely to require considerable support in their post-16 transitions. The Renew and Reform programme has been initiated to address these concerns, and further work on impacts and engagement with stakeholder, including children and young people will be an integral part of the work going forward.

The post-16 and transitions project's main aim is to ensure young people are not disadvantaged as a result of the pandemic. Improving learner engagement and outcomes are at the heart of everything the SHELL team does. The project will help guide the coordination of activity among providers to make the most of the work taking place. In addition, the Welsh Government will collaborate with the sectors to secure improvements on a national level; these will facilitate the work of providers and achieve value for money through economies of scale.

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# Children's rights impact assessment

## Policy objectives

After reviewing the weight of impacts on children and young people from the interventions, restrictions and impacts of Covid, the Renew and Reform programme was put in place to address the short, medium and long term impacts on learners as a result of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Enhancing support for learning has been the core focus of the programme, ensuring all children and young people have secure foundations to learn and make progress in their education. Welsh Government allocated additional funding to post-16 providers of education and training across Wales, in order to facilitate their work in responding to, and recovering from, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The overarching aim of the funding has been to both provide additional support for learners, whose education and development has been disrupted by the pandemic, and to support the education workforce, who have faced considerable pressures during this period.

The Renew and Reform programme's tranche 2 initiatives in scope here are intended to positively impact on young people that have been affected by the pandemic and disruptions to face-to-face learning, through tailored support for different cohorts of learners. These comprise all stages of post-16 education, i.e. learners from HE, FE, sixth forms, apprenticeships, adult community learning and individuals on Jobs Growth Wales+. Individual programmes are specifically tailored towards a particular cohort of learners, for example, Welsh speakers or apprentices, but in their entirety the initiatives cater for the full range of post-16 learners. Specific focus of some initiatives is also on those young people at risk of becoming NEET and to support every learner in order to achieve their full potential. The ultimate aim is to make transitions from school to work and between different forms of post-16 education as smooth as possible and enable young people to make decisions in an informed manner.

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## Gathering evidence and engaging with children and young People

The Renew and Reform Post-16 and Transitions project is underpinned by the recognition that good quality evidence is vital to navigate the unique circumstances presented by the pandemic, its impacts and the policy challenges it represents.

The pandemic has impacted children and young people in a disproportionate manner. Lockdown has impacted on their development and the economic shock on their employment prospects (**The Prince's Trust Tesco Youth Index 2021**). Prior to the pandemic, young people's participation in education and the labour market had grown since the 2008 recession. It is too soon to assess the impact of the pandemic on this trend. Using the main measure of young people in education, employment or training, there had been increases among young people aged 19 to 24 prior to the pandemic. For 16 to 18 year-olds, the proportion increased slightly between 2008 and 2012, and has fluctuated at around 89-90% in recent years. The effect of the 2008 recession was felt more sharply by the 19 to 24 age group. Since then, the share in education or the labour market has generally been increasing, though it has levelled off in the most recent two years. At the end of 2019 the rate stood at 84.3%, around 7 percentage points higher than in 2012. At age 16 to 18, females are more likely than males to be in education, employment or training. In the 19 to 24 age group, males typically have higher participation rates than females though the gap has narrowed in recent years.

The effects of school closures on children's education and the effects of the deepest recession in history on the job and earnings prospects of those young people entering the labour market post-pandemic will be damaging, long-lasting and felt much more acutely by those who are already disadvantaged. The Sutton Trust reports that pupils at independent schools are twice as likely to attend

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online lessons on a daily basis as are pupils at state schools, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has shown that this isn't simply a state/private divide. State schools serving better-off pupils are much more likely to be offering active help with learning than are those serving more disadvantaged pupils. Since schools closed, children from better-off families have been spending 30 per cent more time on home learning than have poorer children. This is due to various reasons such as having access to more resources (e.g., private tutoring or chats with teachers), a better home set-up for distance learning (for example, access to a laptop/tablet/ internet), and their parents reporting feeling more able to support them. The gap in learning time between better and worse-off children is having measurable impacts on outcomes and the pandemic effect of discrepancies in available support can undo many years of progress towards better educational attainment by the most disadvantaged (Johnson, P. (2020) **School closures have put an entire generation at a huge disadvantage**).

The programmes are anticipated to have a positive impact on young people as it offers targeted support to ease post-16 transitions for a variety of learner groups. There is no negative impact anticipated on younger children who are currently outside the scope of these initiatives. However, if these pilot programmes should prove successful and become permanent it can be anticipated that there are positive effects on future generations too.

The programmes do not discriminate against any groups of young people with protected characteristics. The online character of most initiatives should make participation easier for young people from remote areas or with disabilities as the need to travel becomes obsolete.

The Understanding Society Covid-19 (Wave 1) Survey found that in Wales, only 9% of students had no access to a computer. However, 48% of students needed to share their devices with others (Benzeval, M. et al (2020) **Understanding Society COVID-19 Survey April Briefing Note: Home schooling**, Understanding Society Working Paper No 12/2020). Some learners from lower

socio-economic backgrounds are likely to be reliant on the equipment provided by their learning provider, including writing materials and laptops. Making sure that every learner has access to digital technology and reliable bandwidth is important due to the mainly online delivery of the initiatives.

The Welsh vocational seminars pilot could be mistakenly considered 'exclusive' because it is aimed at providing subject lessons (approx. one hour a week for 10 weeks) in Welsh, and so will only appeal to learners who can speak Welsh. However, it is aimed at addressing a significant imbalance, which is the lack of post-16 vocational teaching that is available in Welsh in many areas of the country.

It is an integral element of the Welsh Government's Young People's Plan for all policy development regarding the lives of children and young people to listen to young people to develop a greater understanding of the existing and emerging issues they face when we make decision that affect their lives.

The SHELL team within Welsh Government has developed an engagement model to ensure children and young people are provided with meaningful opportunities to express their views and for their views to be taken in account. Young people – including those in sixth form, FE, HE, apprentices and trainees (on the Jobs Growth Wales+) have had the opportunity to have their voices heard as part of the policy and decision-making process through a series of 'learner engagement panels' (online focus groups) starting in February 2022. Participants from all over Wales had been involved, including South, West, North and Mid Wales. Participants included people with disabilities, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and a mixture of Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers.

These focus groups provided insight into their experiences of multiple aspects of education and training, including wellbeing and wider pastoral support as well as teaching, learning and assessment. Learners were also asked to consider a number of proposed support measures and report back on the perceived

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strengths, weaknesses and risks.

The key themes of interest were:

- Studying (how learners were supported with their learning)
- Wellbeing (how learners were supported with physical and mental health)
- Transitioning (how learners were supported in their transition to the next stage of education, training or employment).

## **Analysing the evidence and assessing the impact**

All the ideas presented to participants received positive feedback, with some very enthusiastic responses to the ideas of Alumni Networks in particular. Participants also demonstrated real interest in wanting to develop the other suggestions, indicating potential for all ideas.

Overall, participants were looking for tailored and bespoke ways to support their transitions as well as personalised conversations with peers. Many turn to their peers when it comes to advice and guidance on the future and believe fellow students and alumni can offer a unique and beneficial perspective to them.

Some participants, notably adult learners, enjoy learning from home as they appreciate the flexibility this gives them to fit the learning around their personal lives, especially for those with caring responsibilities. Particularly those learners who feel anxious in big settings welcomed being able to learn from home. Especially when it comes to transitions, some lack confidence to do things in person and generally liked to have transition support online rather than face-to-face.

While the online delivery of the initiatives is anticipated to make access easier and increase uptake of these offers, it has to be kept in mind that some learners participating in our learner engagement panels expressed concerns over their

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online learning experience during lockdown. They spoke of difficulties in focusing, digesting information and asking for help. Some teachers were less able to engage students, less able to read the atmosphere of the room and less dynamic in their delivery compared to in-person teaching. However, others were impressed by the personalised experience they received from individual teachers and found that some staff managed to adapt the format of learning to suit needs. The initiatives will need to learn from best practice to engage different types of learners successfully. Social activities to accompany the remote delivery or in-person elements even for those programmes which are currently designed for exclusive online delivery are a possible mitigation strategy.

Participants were generally looking to achieve a combination of home and in-person learning. They like the idea of having flexibility and more choice in the way they learn. They also stated that the routine and format of learning can make a big difference to individual wellbeing and so the 'in person' experience should not be underestimated.

An overwhelming majority of learners stressed the importance of learner wellbeing, as it could shape the experiences of learners, influence results and affect individual outcomes.

Participants spoke of the importance of not forgetting to involve parents. They believed parents are key influencers of young people (particularly those living at home) and so targeting parents with support and information would also be useful.

## Summary of feedback on the specific initiatives

### Tailored Work Experience

Apprentices, in particular, liked this idea. They felt that getting the chance to test a workplace out before deciding on a course would be beneficial. For those who were disengaged in school, they felt this was a more relevant and meaningful use of time than being in a classroom. They stressed the importance of financial incentives to avoid this being seen as 'cheap labour'. Covering travel costs should be a minimum as well as pay after a probationary period was passed. Gaining a qualification out of this would not only attract interest of young people in this initiative, but also convince parents of the validity of the scheme.

### University Ready

Feedback was sought from Sixth Formers and HE students. Participants felt that advice and guidance particularly around writing personal statements, applications, making decisions and applying for funding were always useful. They sought support from someone to break down the information for school leavers, pointing them in the right direction and being there for advice would relieve a lot of stress. Support for learners also about managing wellbeing at university, including how to settle, how to make friends and how to manage stress should also be included. They also felt this idea would benefit from having a careers advice element to it, emphasising the connection between certain courses and careers. Learners felt that if they were going to get into student debt, they needed reassurance that there would be good employment prospects at the end.

One single platform was seen as more helpful than multiple routes. Schools and teachers should be informed of the initiative, and it was warned against

substandard and tokenistic provisions which would not be used by learners. Tailored programmes such as the SEREN Network which is helpful for those interested mainly in Oxford or Cambridge were viewed as good existing examples, but something similar should be developed to make it inclusive of wider aspirations and useful for those who are not interested in elite universities.

Many also felt there should be provisions for parents on the hub, to broaden their understanding and also inform them when university was not the best options. Some spoke of parental pressures, due to outdated notions of the benefits of HE; they felt parents needed educating as much as learners.

## **Alumni Networks**

Feedback was sought from FE and adult learners. Participants considered this an excellent idea. They liked the fact the support that was peer-led as they believed it helped to know the educational journey of people similar to themselves and how their learning resulted in different outcomes. They liked the idea that this would not be simply delivered as a talk but gave them the chance to speak directly to alumni. Small group sessions were preferred over big sessions which were seen as too impersonal and making it more difficult to ask questions. They felt that the more personal the experience the better; rather than networks that talk generically about 'university life' or 'getting into the workplace' it would be more useful to get insight into specific universities or specific career paths.

## **Welsh Language Vocational Networks**

Feedback was sought from apprentices, trainees adult learners and FE students. Many Welsh speakers were supportive of this idea and felt that specialist guidance on technical terminology would be helpful. The initiative would help refresh their memory of the language (if they hadn't used it in a

while) and also support students who may have had to change to an English language course. Some Welsh speakers felt this could be broadened beyond vocational courses as they'd also appreciate opportunities to fine tune their subject specific terminology.

Non-Welsh speakers were also supportive of the initiative and felt that setting up networks for Welsh speakers should be championed for the language to keep thriving. They would also be interested in a network for Welsh learners that helped them with workplace language.

## UNCRC Articles or Optional Protocol

UNCRC Articles or Optional Protocol	Enhances (X)	Challenges (X)	Explanation
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Article 23 (children with a disability)	X		Most of the initiatives are provided online, making access for young people with mobility issues easier.
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Article 28 (right to education)	X		The initiatives inform about and support entry to different forms of secondary and tertiary education and thus make a variety of options available to young people.
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Article 29 (goals of education)	X		The initiatives support different forms of education that help develop young people's talents and abilities to the full. The Net Zero Wales initiative in particular encourages the young person's respect for the environment.
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UNCRC Articles or Optional Protocol	Enhances (X)	Challenges (X)	Explanation
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Article 30 (learn and use language of family)	X		Participants are able to access the initiatives through the medium of Welsh or English. For those whose first language is not English or Welsh, support will be provided through the delivery of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision.
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Everyone who meets the qualifying criteria for participation in the respective initiatives, can participate regardless of citizenship status.

## Communicating with Children and Young People

We are currently developing plans for the national conversation with external stakeholders and partners (including Children in Wales) that work closely with children and young people aged 16-24 across the wide range of backgrounds listed above, and also by regions across Wales.

We are also looking to establish a Young Persons Forum as a means of an ongoing relationship with a representative group, able to help plan and guide the national conversations as they develop across the next 3 years. The Young Persons Forum will also enable discussion around proposals and recommendations that will subsequently form Ministerial advice and decisions.

In the interim, part of the National Conversation includes a Young Persons Advisory Group that will be used to gather some initial data but also as a Board to discuss findings and feedback as the conversation progresses through 2022

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to 2023.

Working with stakeholders, we have agreed Principles for our engagement with young people, the purpose of which is to ensure that during the national conversations, all stakeholders involved are consistently working to help empower young people, enable their participation and are as inclusive as possible. The Principles, which will be included as part of a focus group guidance document, are as follows:

- Make a difference – we will listen, understand and respond
- Reach all communities across Wales, allowing for the needs of different communities
- Involve young people from protected characteristics and other more marginalised, seldom heard groups
- Give all young people the opportunity to take part, with care in the language and methods we use, to help them contribute
- Use our partners, stakeholders and trusted peers to help facilitate young people's involvement
- Support young people to overcome the barriers they face to enable them to contribute
- Continue to keep young people involved in recommendations, changes and decisions based on what young people have told us.

## Monitoring and Review

The Renew and Reform project has, as part of its guiding principles, the aim that measures will be evidence based and that monitoring and evaluation of all support programmes will be undertaken. The project team have therefore commissioned the Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre in summer 2021 to conduct a rapid review of the research evidence on strategies to support learning and wellbeing among 16-19 year old learners. An update on the first report was commissioned in 2022 (Wales COVID-19 Evidence Centre (WCEC))

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**Rapid Review A rapid review of strategies to support learning and wellbeing among 16-19 year old learners who have experienced significant disruption in their education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Report number – RR00044 (July 2022).** Working closely with KAS and external stakeholders an evaluation and monitoring framework has been developed, designed to assess the effectiveness of delivery, outcomes and longer-term impact of projects. It is anticipated monitoring and evaluation data will enable Welsh Government and the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research to determine what impact the additional interventions have on the needs of learners in supporting them recover from the pandemic. This needs to be monitored and managed in collaboration with KAS colleagues.

The policy interventions delivered by this project are aimed at mitigating and reducing the impact of harms stemming from the pandemic. It has to be noted evidence for strategies to support learning and wellbeing for 16-19 years old learners who have experienced significant disruption in their education is from studies conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. Research is therefore required to evaluate whether interventions that were successful in relatively ‘normal’ circumstances will be applicable in the pandemic context. We are therefore collecting data on the impacts and evaluating our policies to determine what we need to do as policy makers in the future. This means we have already committed SHELL and the future Commission to consider that evidence and evaluation in making future policy decisions aimed at supporting children and young people in post-16 education and training, including those young people transitioning into, between and out of post-16 education.

We will draw on the research and evidence gathered by our partners in Wales, particularly Estyn and QAA’s work, to contribute to our evidence on progress and to help build capacity for continuous improvement. We will keep abreast of the evidence emerging in Wales, across the UK and internationally about the impacts of the pandemic on learning and ways to address these impacts. We will also ensure evidence of best practice, innovations, or issues overcome are shared, to help the system improve further.

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