



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

**Response to the Estyn thematic report on
the impact of the Learning and Skills Measure on
vulnerable learners**

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.



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Report title:

Estyn thematic report: The impact of The Learning and Skills Measure on vulnerable learners

Report details:

The report is in response to a request for advice in the annual remit to Estyn for 2016-17 following the recommendation from the Children, Young People and Education Committee that:

'The Welsh Government should evaluate the impact of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure on vulnerable learners, including learners in mainstream schools with additional learning needs and vulnerable learners in further education.' (National Assembly for Wales, 2012, p. 41)

This recommendation followed the committee's review into the implementation of the Learning and Skills Measure.

For the purpose of this remit, the term 'vulnerable learners' means learners with special educational needs (SEN), learners eligible for free schools meals (eFSM), looked after children (LAC), and learners educated other than at school (EOTAS) including in pupil referral units (PRUs).

Summary of main findings:

Since the introduction of the Learning and Skills (Wales) Measure, standards achieved by vulnerable learners at key stage 4 in schools and in further education colleges have generally improved.

Nearly all schools plan a curriculum that meets the requirements of the Measure. However, the curriculum in secondary schools is more limited than it was two years ago which can partly be attributed to changes in performance measures.

In a few schools, the choice of vocational courses has also been reduced and this impacts on the appropriateness of the curriculum available for many vulnerable learners. There are also some progression issues due to the number of level 1 courses being offered in colleges reducing.

Personal support in schools and further education colleges is generally of a high quality and learners benefit from a wide range of intervention strategies that help them achieve successful outcomes. However, there has been a steady decline in the availability of learning support provided by learning coaches due to funding reductions. The effectiveness of careers advice has also been identified as too variable.

The majority of schools and all colleges evaluate performance data and monitor individual learners' progress. However, the role of the regional consortia in

supporting schools and local authorities with regard to vulnerable learners is variable and there is no established common or consistent practice.

Most local authorities track the progress of LAC learners centrally, however, the tracking of a few LAC learners who are placed out of county is less effective.

EOTAS provision for learners aged 14-19 years feature in key local authority strategic plans, however, these plans do not always lead well enough to effective policy to improve practices across all the organisations and generally focus on improving aspects only of EOTAS, such as PRUs, exclusions, attendance and the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Recommendations 1 and 2

Schools, further education colleges, regional consortia and local authorities should raise the attainment of vulnerable learners so that it is more in line with their peers by:

R1 Tracking and monitoring the achievements of vulnerable learners more closely, and analysing data on groups of vulnerable learners better

R2 Improving their attendance and ensuring that they have access to targeted support

These recommendations directly support the principles of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework (YEPF). We are therefore supportive of these recommendations in terms of further embedding the YEPF in schools and colleges.

The Welsh Government has already acknowledged that learners accessing EOTAS provision are not always given the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

The key provisions of the EOTAS Framework for Action, which was developed by the cross-sector EOTAS Task and Finish Group, and published in December 2017 include:

- a commitment to review the curriculum requirements for pupil referral units and wider EOTAS provision;
- standardised referral and registration practices to ensure that placements in EOTAS services are appropriate and allow learners to fulfil their potential; and,

- national guidance for commissioning frameworks to ensure that non-maintained services providing EOTAS to local authorities maintain appropriate service levels

We also know that as at 31 March 2017, 30% of looked after children in Wales did not live in the authority which looked after them (the corporate parent). This can create logistical challenges for the corporate parent.

In January 2016 we published the looked after children education plan – [Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales](#). This joint education and social services plan sets out a series of actions to strengthen arrangements to support the education of children who are looked after so they are assisted and encouraged to achieve their ambitions, hopes and aspirations.

The plan includes actions over three years for the Wales Government and its key partners – local authorities, regional education consortia, schools and colleges. The contribution of agencies other than education, especially local authority social services, is crucial. It is critical that they play their part in ensuring stability of placements with suitable education provision is a priority consideration before a placement is agreed.

Our plan recognises that the educational journey of looked after children must be better tracked so that rich information, and not just data can be exchanged when a child moves school and to keep an accurate record of their learning. Better tracking also helps identify where there are gaps in a child's educational development and where additional support is needed – this is very important when monitoring children who are placed out of county/country and those who attend independent special schools linked to children homes.

Action no.24 in our plan states that *arrangements should be made to improve tracking to monitor the educational progress of looked after children and ensure meaningful Personal Education Plans and Individual Development Plans. There are examples of good practice in some local authorities where systems are in place to track and trace every child's progress. This is especially important where a child is placed and educated out of the host local authority. Regional education consortia and should work with LACE coordinators to identify and share examples of good tracking and monitoring systems.*

EAS and GWE have made/undertaken significant project work to improve tracking and monitoring systems in their regions and this good practice has been shared via our National Strategic Group which comprises educational practitioners.

Recommendation 3

Schools, further education colleges, regional consortia and local authorities should raise the attainment of vulnerable learners so that it is more in line with their peers by:

R3 Evaluating the curriculum to consider the extent to which it meets the needs of vulnerable learners and offers them opportunities to gain appropriate qualifications

The Welsh Government supports this recommendation. It is important that the choice of courses offered is not influenced by how they contribute to performance indicators for the provider rather than being the best choice for individual learners.

Working with the teaching profession, local government, consortia, unions and international experts, we have been undertaking a fundamental review of the current school accountability system in Wales to meet the needs of the new curriculum, which is presently under development. As part of new self-evaluation arrangements, schools will need to show how they are making improvements for all learners and settings. We are also considering revising performance measures that will enable us to maintain a better perspective on pupil attainment and provide further insight into achievement of pupils of all levels.

We recognise that performance measures need to drive an inclusive and diverse curriculum benefitting all pupils and we will develop a suite of quality performance measures that will celebrate all grades and recognise progression.

The Welsh Government is currently working with its partners to progress the recommendation by Estyn in its report *Raising the attainment, achievement and aspiration of children who are looked after* that performance measures for looked after children should be broadened to include progress that is relative to the child's starting point in education and extends beyond statutory school age.

In terms of progression, the guidance for Key Stage 4 and post 16 local curriculum planners makes it clear that learners who are unable to access level 2 courses due to their additional learning needs should have opportunities to pursue a choice of courses that allow them to make good progression towards level 2 qualifications. There should be an appropriate range of courses below level 2 to meet the need of learners for whom these programmes are most suitable.

Publication details:

The report was published on 27 April 2017 on Estyn's website:
www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports