

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i'r [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg](#) ar [Llwybrau at addysg a hyfforddiant ôl-16](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) on the [Routes into post-16 education and training](#)

RET 10

Ymateb gan: Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM)

Response from: Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM)

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai (GLLM) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important consultation. We believe this inquiry is a vital step toward developing an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable framework for post-16 education and training in Wales. Demand for post-16 education is increasing, driven by rising enrolments, additional learning needs, and greater mental health challenges among learners. To address these pressures, we advocate for:

- Multi-year funding commitments to provide stability and allow for the continued development of robust support systems for mental health, wellbeing, and additional learning needs.
- Enhanced financial support for transport, living costs, and additional services to ensure equitable access for all learners.
- Sustained resources for colleges to deliver high-quality vocational education that aligns with economic priorities and provides learners with equitable opportunities.

Strengthening Transition Pathways

To support successful transitions into post-16 education, GLLM has established positive partnerships with schools and local authorities across North Wales, working collaboratively with Coleg Cambria. This includes data sharing on barriers faced by Year 11 learners, ensuring that we can address challenges early and provide targeted support. This model has been highly effective, but dedicated long-term funding is needed to sustain and expand it. However, access to pre-16 learners who may not yet consider college as an option is less equitable. Impartial advice and guidance (A&G) is not consistently provided to all learners, limiting their understanding of post-16 options. GLLM's transition project with local authorities has been highly successful, ensuring effective transitions for learners who apply. There is variability in the quality of A&G provided to pre-16 learners, with some Year 11 pupils not receiving impartial advice about college and apprenticeship options. However, greater collaboration is needed with schools to ensure consistent access to A&G for all pre-16 learners. To improve outcomes, we recommend:

- Strengthening access to 15-year-old learners to ensure they can make informed choices.

- Supporting transition projects that include impartial A&G for pre-16 learners and their families. Although we have strong relationships with Careers Wales, the support Careers Wales can offer post-16 learners has been reduced significantly, particularly for post-18 A&G. Additionally, not all pre-16 learners receive full information on options after Year 11, which prevents them from making the best-informed decisions.

While Careers Wales plays an essential role in providing guidance, the reduced capacity for post-16 A&G highlights a critical gap in the system. Strengthening collaboration between colleges, schools, and Careers Wales could help ensure that all learners—pre-16, post-16, and beyond—receive comprehensive careers advice and guidance on their options. This should include targeted outreach to learners and families to demystify the pathways available and support better decision-making.

Welsh Medium Provision

GLLM provides the most extensive Welsh medium/bilingual provision in Wales, supported by funding from Welsh Government and Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol. This funding enables us to increase our Welsh medium offering and support bilingual learners effectively. We would welcome additional funding to extend this approach to other settings, such as schools and universities, to foster a more seamless and cohesive bilingual education system across Wales. Expanding Welsh medium provision ensures learners can continue their education in their chosen language, supporting the vision of a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

Equity of Access

We welcome the funding that has already been put in place to support equitable access to post-16 education and training in Wales. However, there are significant areas of concern that need addressing to ensure equity for all learners.

While the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) continues to provide critical support for learners from low-income households, the threshold for eligibility has not risen in line with increases in the National Minimum Wage. This disparity risks excluding a growing number of families who are struggling with the rising cost of living but fall just above the current threshold. Adjusting the EMA threshold to reflect wage inflation would ensure that financial support reaches those who need it most. Additionally, there is increasing pressure on the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) within colleges. GLLM is seeing growing demands on this fund as it provides essential financial support for transport and daily meal allowances for learners. These rising costs have a significant impact on colleges' ability to meet the needs of all students. Without additional funding from the Welsh Government, should there be an increase in demand, colleges face challenges in continuing to offer this vital support.

Transport remains a significant barrier to post-16 education, and GLLM faces several challenges in this area. There is a reliance on local authorities to provide transport for post-16 learners, however, this is often undermined by:

- Cuts to local authority budgets, which limit learners' ability to access education.
- Inconsistencies in post-16 travel policies between local authorities, creating inequities for learners in different regions.
- The lack of equitable transport options for learners attending college and apprenticeships.

Certain groups of learners face significant barriers under the current system, including those from low-income households and those with extensive travel needs, particularly in rural areas. The costs associated with travel can disproportionately affect learners in remote regions, further widening the gap in access to education.

We urge the Welsh Government to ensure that the Learner Travel Offer explicitly addresses post-16 learners' needs. This must include consistent funding for post-16 transport, whether managed by colleges or local authorities, and encompass apprenticeships. Collaboration between local authorities and education providers is essential to resolve disparities.

In response to the financial crisis, GLLM has implemented a universal breakfast offer to ensure no learner starts their day hungry. While this initiative has been greatly beneficial, it has been funded on a project basis and lacks sustainable funding for the future. An increase in FCF funding or targeted support from the Welsh Government would allow GLLM to continue providing such essential services, ensuring that every learner has access to a free meal and is better equipped to engage in their education.

We must also consider the broader equality issues that impact post-16 learners. For instance, ensuring that students with additional learning needs or disabilities receive adequate support remains a priority. Furthermore, as the cost of living crisis continues, there is a growing need for a comprehensive approach to financial assistance that includes all students, irrespective of their specific circumstances, to promote inclusion and equal opportunities.

Central to enabling learners to thrive is a strong focus on their wellbeing, mental health, and personal development, as outlined in the Donaldson Report's vision for holistic, learner-centered education. GLLM urges the Welsh Government to prioritise long-term funding for pastoral and mentoring roles, which are vital in:

- Supporting learners to develop healthy attendance patterns and sustained engagement with their education.
- Addressing the increasing number of mental health challenges learners face, particularly those exacerbated by the pandemic.

- Helping to build learners' resilience, enabling them to navigate challenges and become confident, ethical, and informed citizens of Wales.

Pastoral care and mentoring roles are instrumental in nurturing learners' confidence and wellbeing. However, annual funding cycles are insufficient to achieve these outcomes. ***We recommend a minimum of three-year funding cycles*** to ensure stability in pastoral teams. Frequent short-term funding has resulted in experienced staff leaving roles after 9-12 months, undermining continuity and the development of meaningful relationships with learners. A longer funding cycle would allow colleges to implement effective mental health initiatives, including early intervention programs that prevent crises and support learners proactively. Multi-year funding would also enable institutions to attract and retain high-quality staff, ensuring learners consistently receive impactful support over time.

Post-16 Destination Data

The post-16 destination data collected by Welsh Government currently presents challenges:

- The dataset contains many "unknown" entries and is not provided at a learner-level, making it difficult to analyse outcomes for specific campuses or courses.
- While GLLM collates its own progression data based on learner feedback, this is limited to internal transitions to further education or apprenticeships and does not provide insights into employment outcomes or salary data.

We strongly advocate for improved quality and granularity of destination data and for colleges to be given access to this information. This would enable institutions to better evaluate learner outcomes and align programs with labour market demands.

Grŵp Llandrillo Menai is committed to supporting the Welsh Government's vision for a fairer, more inclusive, and learner-focused post-16 education system. By addressing funding inequities, resolving transport challenges, enhancing Welsh medium provision, and improving careers support, we can create a system that enables every learner, regardless of background or location, to succeed.