

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

RET 11

Ymateb gan: Asiantaeth Sicrhau Ansawdd ar gyfer Addysg Uwch

Response from: Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)

This document is available in English and Welsh.

What is the Access to Higher Education Diploma?

The Access to Higher Education Diploma is a qualification which prepares those who do not have traditional qualifications for study at University. They are delivered by colleges in Wales and England. The diploma is an equivalent qualification to A levels and the Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced. QAA regulates the activity of the Access Validating Agencies, who partner with colleges who wish to deliver the diploma.

Who can study an Access to Higher Education Diploma?

Access to HE diplomas are taken by students of all ages and backgrounds. In 2022/23:

- 40% were under 25 (the proportion of under-19s is increasing each year)
- 76% are female
- 24% are from ethnic minorities
- 39% are from disadvantaged areas

The Diploma at a glance:

- 90.4% of graduates were employed or in further study 6 months after graduation
- 77% of students stayed in their local area to study in higher education

The Diploma in Wales:

Agored Cymru is the Access Validating Agency that works with colleges across Wales to deliver the Access to HE Diploma. In 2023/24, 1486 learners were studying the Access to HE Diploma in Wales across 15 providers, all validated by Agored Cymru. In 2023/24 50% of these learners were registered from an area of disadvantage, compared to just 29% of Access students nationally (England and Wales). The majority of learners studying the Access to HE Diploma in Wales are on courses related to health, public services and care. Health Education Improvement Wales (HEIW) value this route as a key source of recruitment, particularly for adult nursing. 82% of students that go on to higher education after studying the diploma in Wales stay in Wales for that higher education

The Welsh colleges that deliver the Access to HE Diploma are:

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|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| ○ Coleg Cambria | ○ Coleg Menai | ○ Pembrokeshire |
| ○ Coleg Gwent | ○ Grŵp NPTC Group | College |
| ○ Cardiff and Vale | ○ Coleg Llandrillo | ○ Coleg Ceredigion |
| College | ○ Coleg Sir Gâr | ○ Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor |
| ○ Gower College | ○ Bridgend College | ○ Coleg Powys |
| Swansea | ○ The College Merthyr | |
| ○ Coleg y Cymoedd | Tydfil | |

Colleges receive funding to deliver the Access to HE Diploma only when students study full time. These arrangements would benefit from some reform to provide equal funding for other modes of delivery like part-time study. This could encourage more flexible study options and increase access to higher education in Wales.