

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

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Ymateb gan: Cymwysterau Cymru  
Response from: Qualifications Wales

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Dear CYPE Committee Chair,

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the CYPE committee inquiry into routes into post-16 education and training. As the independent regulator of non-degree qualifications in Wales, our aim is to shape qualifications that meet the needs of both learners and the Welsh economy.

We've provided written evidence on some of the areas of focus in the inquiry that are most relevant to our work

If you require further any further information, then please let us know. We look forward to working with you going forward.

Gyda diolch



David Jones OBE DL  
**Chair**



Philip Blaker  
**Chief Executive**

Imperial Park,  
Newport  
NP10 8AR  
☎ 01633 373 222



Parc Imperial,  
Casnewydd  
NP10 8AR  
☎ 01633 373 222

[www.qualificationswales.org](http://www.qualificationswales.org)

## Changes in routes post-18

- **Is there evidence that learners are changing their choices post-18, including a drop in Higher Education enrolments, and if so why?**

There have been recent media articles on a declining university application rate amongst 18-year-olds in Wales. It would be useful to understand whether this reflects a real reduction in university entry rates in Wales. There are alternative possible explanations, such as a reduction in full time entry via the main university application scheme administered by UCAS. The 2024 end of cycle data published by UCAS actually saw a slight increase in the university application rate from 18 year olds in Wales once UCAS had received data on direct applications to universities and could take these into account. Direct applications do not feature in UCAS publications earlier in the cycle.

**Age group, Domicile - UK/EU/Not EU, Gender**

Age group	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>18</b>	30.8%	32.1%	32.8%	33.3%	34.3%	36.6%	37.8%	37.1%	35.7%	36.4%
⊕ England	31.4%	32.7%	33.6%	34.0%	35.3%	37.7%	38.5%	37.8%	36.5%	37.2%
⊕ Northern Ireland	33.3%	34.8%	34.6%	35.5%	35.5%	41.0%	42.4%	40.2%	37.7%	37.9%
⊕ Scotland	24.7%	25.4%	25.5%	26.1%	25.5%	26.8%	29.9%	30.5%	29.6%	30.4%
⊕ Wales	28.3%	29.6%	29.5%	29.8%	30.1%	31.2%	33.6%	32.1%	29.9%	30.1%
<b>Total</b>	30.8%	32.1%	32.8%	33.3%	34.3%	36.6%	37.8%	37.1%	35.7%	36.4%

Source: [UCAS Undergraduate end of cycle data resources 2024](#)

It is also important to consider the impact that higher qualification outcomes might have had during the 'Covid years' as a consequence of either direct grading by schools and colleges or atypical grading policy. This will impact the reference years used when making any analysis.

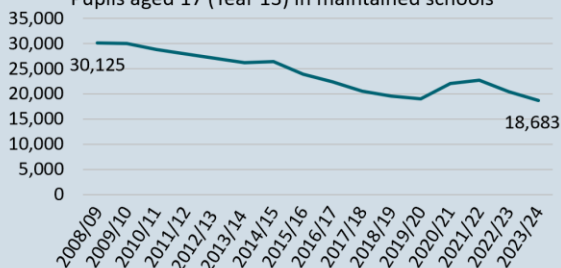
It is also possible that the high cost of living and the cost of university education is driving more learners in Wales to take alternative paths through higher education. For example, they could be studying qualifications in the higher education provision at a Further Education college. Often these qualifications are counted as equivalent to part of an undergraduate degree.

In the qualification system we have seen a reduction in A level entries in Wales over time with a steeper decrease in entries from year 13s in secondary sixth forms (see below). Given that A levels are still the main route into full time higher education study, this trend could be linked to changes in the way learners in Wales are engaging with higher education.

## Cyfanswm cofrestriadau Safon Uwch dros amser

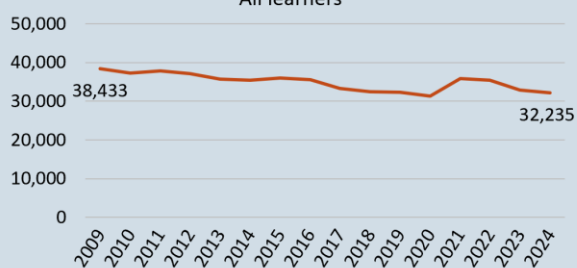
### Total A level entries over time

Disgyblion 17 oed (Blwyddyn 13) mewn ysgolion a gynhelir  
Pupils aged 17 (Year 13) in maintained schools



Ffynhonnell/Source: [Ymgeisiadau a chanlyniadau lefel A \(disgyblion oed 17 yn unig\) fesul grŵp pwnc](#)

Pob dysgwr  
All learners



Ffynhonnell/Source: [JCQ](#)

Rhwng 2009 a 2024, fe wnaeth cyfanswm y cofrestriadau Safon Uwch yng Nghymru ostwng 16.1%. Fe wnaeth nifer y cofrestriadau ar gyfer dysgwyr Blwyddyn 13 mewn chweched dosbarth ysgolion a gynhelir ostwng 38.0%. Mae dysgwyr mewn chweched dosbarth yn cynrychioli cyfran lai o gyfanswm y cofrestriadau nag mewn blynyddoedd blaenorol.

Between 2009 and 2024, total A level entries in Wales decreased by 16.1%. Entries for Year 13 learners in maintained school sixth forms decreased by 38.0%. Learners in sixth forms represent a smaller proportion of total entries than in previous years.

Sources: [A level entries and results \(pupils aged 17 only\) by subject group, Examination Results Archive - JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications](#)

### Welsh-medium provision

- **The availability of post-16 options (both academic and vocational) through the medium of Welsh, and how this impacts on young people's choices.**

There are 202 qualifications that are approved for learners aged 16 to 18, including the full suite of A levels, which are available through the medium of Welsh as a condition of their approved status. In addition, there are currently 2,978 qualifications listed on QiW (our database of qualifications) as designated for learners aged 16 to 18. Of these, 618 are fully available in Welsh and 277 are partially available in Welsh. These figures represent the number of qualifications that are eligible for use on publicly-funded programmes of learning for learners aged 16 to 18, as of 16 January 2025, but whether or not these qualifications are actually made available to learners depends on what learning providers choose to offer. It is worth noting that many of the remaining 2,083 (c70%) will have very low entry numbers and may have no demand through the medium of Welsh. Previous analysis showed that c85% of qualifications offered post-16 in Wales had fewer than 100 learners per year. This impacts on the commercial and operational viability of awarding bodies making all qualifications available through the medium of Welsh.

Since 2023, we have refined our approach to post-16 vocational qualifications being available in Welsh. As our recent [progress report](#) highlights, we have made good progress to date. We have noted a marked increase in awarding bodies engaging

with our Welsh-medium discussions and Welsh Language Support Grant, with some engaging with the grant for the first time during 2023/24 and 2024/25.

Our report also highlights that we surpassed our initial target of getting 120 targeted qualifications made available through the medium of Welsh during this two-year period. This targeted approach was developed in conjunction with Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol as part of our partnership working. We also know from our regular discussions with awarding bodies that our targeted approach has encouraged some to expand their plans for Welsh-medium provision and submit a greater number of qualifications within their grant applications, as a result of our targeted work. We intend to build on the momentum of our targeted work as part of our Cymraeg Strategy, which will be published later this year, so that we can further increase the range of Welsh-medium qualifications available to post-16 learners.

While our work with awarding bodies to issue grants has been very successful, we are always limited by the funds available to us. Over recent years we have managed to implement a scheme where Welsh Government has been able to underwrite our budget allocation by a small amount which has enabled us to issue a higher level of grant funding than would otherwise be the case. While this underwriting has not yet been needed, we are conscious that our development of National 14-16 Qualifications will draw considerably on this grant funding over the next two years and we have asked Welsh Government if additional funding can be made available.

### **Post-16 destination data**

- **Is there sufficient post-16 destination data collected to understand trends and inform what education institutions deliver? If not, what data is required to fully understand the post-16 landscape?**

In terms of publicly funded provision, it's not clear whether there is a problem with insufficient data collection of post-16 education and training, although there are inconsistencies in available data on learners across school sixth forms and other settings. Some degree of inconsistency is likely unavoidable due to differences in administration across settings, but in general the system should be interested in any opportunities to harmonise data across settings where appropriate. Establishing Medr as the body responsible for funding and regulating the tertiary education and research sector in Wales is an opportunity that can promote consistency of data collection and reporting.

It is likely there have been capacity issues in producing analysis of the existing data on tertiary education pathways, although integrating the available statistical analysis resource on tertiary education within Medr could help.

During the pandemic, Welsh Government produced a detailed analysis of Year 11-to-tertiary education progression in addition to the consistent performance measures, and there would be value in refreshing that analysis, making it more detailed by learner characteristics and considering making it a regular statistical output, subject to resources.

It should also be noted that there are always difficulties inherent in collecting meaningful destinations data when learners leave education and enter work. However, meaningful data that shows progression into work, and that reaches into the early careers of young people, would be invaluable to the education system.

### **Additional General Point**

While not a focus of the consultation, we would like to take the opportunity to raise the issue of post-16 retakes of GCSEs with the committee. Unlike England there is not a clear policy position on the retake of GCSEs in English and Mathematics (and for Wales Welsh also) in post-16 settings. This said, many learners do re-take GCSEs as part of their post-16 studies. This places learning pressures on them and operational pressures on post-16 settings, particularly FE colleges.

We believe that it is important to clarify the policy position in relation to re-takes so that learners are entered for the right courses. We appreciate that it is important for some learners to re-take GCSEs so that they can access certain continued education courses or employment. But this is not the position for all and without clarity on the policy position it could be that re-takes are being undertaken inappropriately.

It could also be that this matter affects learners commitment to post-16 programmes of learning, which in turn could affect drop out rates.