

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 22

Ymateb gan: Coleg y Cymoedd

Response from: Coleg y Cymoedd

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We are pleased to submit the following evidence.

### **Question 1 - Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options**

- Coleg y Cymoedd believe that improving independent advice and guidance for learners is absolutely critical.
- A variety of reports recommend strengthening this area such as:
  - The Transitions to Employment report by Dr Hefin David MS
  - The Welsh Government's Review of Vocational Qualifications
  - The Learning and Skills Measure (2009)
  - In 2022, Estyn found that options to continue learning at 16 vary considerably depending on where learners live in Wales, what language they wish to learn in, and what their education attainment was at age 16.
  - In Colegau Cymru's Taith funded research into the Finnish VET system, it is clear that the issue of 'attractive' pathways can be complex. Often individual learner choices are constrained by their environments and knowledge of working life, so guidance plays a key role in this.
- Advice and guidance could be greatly enhanced if learners were given their GCSE results in the middle of July rather than the end of August. This should be possible given the increased use of technology by awarding organisations.

### **Question 2 - How effective careers support is at compulsory school age**

- Despite the work of Careers Wales in engaging with schools it is clear that too many young people do not have access to the information and guidance they need to make informed choices about their future, including the opportunities in vocational education and training.
- Improving opportunities for collaboration between colleges and schools, particularly in supporting the transition into post-16 and in offering vocational programmes at study between 14-16, will significantly help learners, parents and carers make informed choices.

### **Question 3 - Changes in routes post-18**

- Despite the national decline in applications to HE for September 2024, Coleg y Cymoedd recorded an increase in learners applying to attend HEI in 2024/25.
- However, enrolment on HE courses at Coleg y Cymoedd has dropped from around 400 learners in 2019/20 to 270 in 2024/25. This is mainly due to lower enrolments in part time evening provision.

- There is scope to further develop the role of FE institutions in delivering access to higher education for local communities, either as a direct provider, offering progression and lifelong learning routes at Levels 4 and 5 to enable upskilling and reskilling, and in delivering degree apprenticeships.

#### **Question 4 - Welsh-medium provision**

- Coleg y Cymoedd is supportive of the Welsh Government's aspiration for one million Welsh speakers and increased learning through the medium of Welsh is welcome.
- The workforce challenge in meeting the ambition to create more bilingual pathways in post-16 is considerable. Significant investment in education, and specifically teacher recruitment and development, is required. This includes not only recruiting new Welsh speaking staff but also upskilling existing staff.
- Coleg y Cymoedd would like to develop the breadth of qualifications being made available through the medium of Welsh. However, funding to support delivery through the medium of Welsh needs to be increased. At present, Coleg y Cymoedd only receives around £30,000 from Medr. This funding has not increased for several years despite the growth in learners enrolling at Coleg y Cymoedd from Welsh medium schools.

#### **Question 5 - Equity of access**

- Coleg y Cymoedd supports a higher percentage of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds compared local school Sixth forms.
- At Coleg y Cymoedd, about 40% of learners aged 16-18 currently receive the EMA. This is 10% fewer than 2017/18 where around 50% of learners received the EMA. Around 65% of full-time learners are from quintile 1 and 2 postcodes.
- Learners from more deprived areas require a higher level of financial support. There is support available to college learners via the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) which is critical for colleges to flexibly use to meet the support needs of their learners. However, with increased enrolment in 2024/25, particularly from learners from deprived areas means that the fund will be exhausted far quicker.
- The mental health support needs for young people are also increasing year on year which again adds an additional financial strain to Coleg y Cymoedd. Various external reports have reported the impact of mental health challenges most recently 'The Learner experiences in post-16 education' (2024). We believe that longer term funding arrangements are critical for delivering better mental health and wellbeing support. Demand for FE, and in particular vocational provision, is rising. The education and social impact of the pandemic is still evident through poor levels of attendance in schools, significant mental health challenges facing many learners, and evidence of wider behavioural challenges of learners entering college. At Coleg y Cymoedd, in 2024/25 we have 350 more 16–18-year-olds compared to 2023/24, a rise of 8%. The rise in enrolment are learners coming in at lower levels and learners who are at risk of becoming NEET and therefore require greater support to remain in education.
- We also must be mindful of the increased cost of travel which learners face from September onwards. According to the Welsh Government's own data, 41% of 16 to 24 years olds identified transport as being the number one barrier to getting a new course, training or a job. As a result of budgetary cuts to local authority budgets fewer learners will get free travel to schools and colleges. This year learners who live 2 miles from college receive assistance. RCT will change the distance from 2 miles to 3 miles in September 2025. We estimated that this could impact around 1000 of our current learners as they live between 2-3 miles from the college.
- Coleg y Cymoedd would welcome changes to the Learner Travel Measure (2008) which would support learners to attend college.

- The implementation of Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (ALNET) is already transforming the learner experience in FE. However, sustaining and building on this progress will require ongoing support from Welsh Government and LAs.
- At Coleg y Cymoedd we need enhanced funding, and long-term financial commitment to support the additional resources required for ALN provision.
- We have already increased staffing levels to meet the new ALN duties. However, this has been achieved with limited additional short-term funding and no certainty of long-term financial support. Addressing the resourcing challenges of the duties in the post-16 sector must be addressed for both the short and longer term. Alongside the need to better resource support for additional learning needs, there are other challenges to be addressed: information sharing; consistency in provision; specialist provision; and building stronger collaboration.

#### **Question 6 - Post-16 destination data**

- PLASC data shows that around 20% of learners drop out of school sixth form at the end of year 12. Coleg y Cymoedd believe this is due to ineffective careers advice and guidance which favour academic route above vocational routes.
- Greater data sharing between school, colleges, careers wales and HEI would be beneficial.

#### **Question 7 - Welsh Government's role**

- Coleg y Cymoedd recognise the long-standing support that the Welsh Government has given to the FE sector. Since merger, the college has undergone significant change and reorganisation to help us deliver on the priorities of the Welsh Government and of local communities. We are well placed to be able to respond to the changing skills landscape and to support growth in the Welsh economy.
- We believe The Welsh Government must develop a strategy for Vocational Education and Training. We would like the Welsh Government to develop a national Strategy for Vocational Education and Training. There is a lack of overall strategic intent and purpose in post-16 policy and a new strategy, aligned to a clear understanding of the requirements of the economy, would ensure the delivery of vocational and technical education that can support growth and offer equitable opportunities for individuals. This ask reiterates the recommendations made both by the Welsh Government's Vocational Qualifications Review and Colegau Cymru's Taith funded research into the Finnish VET system.