

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 31

Ymateb gan: Coleg Gŵyr Abertawe

Response from: Gower College Swansea

1. Effectiveness of Careers Support at Compulsory School Age

Outcomes of Careers Support Pre-16

The effectiveness of careers support at pre-16 is variable, leading to inconsistent outcomes for young people transitioning into post-16 education, employment, or training.

- **Challenges:**
 - **Reduced Careers Wales capacity:** A single Careers Adviser often serves multiple schools (e.g., one adviser for three schools).
 - **Narrow focus:** Careers Wales prioritises NEET prevention, offering face-to-face support only to those identified as at risk, with others restricted to online resources.
 - **Outdated advice:** Careers advice lacks current labour market intelligence (LMI) and an understanding of regional skills needs.
- **Integration of Labour Market Information (LMI):** While it's noted that Careers Wales lacks understanding of LMI, collaboration with colleges and local businesses could bridge this gap. Efforts should focus on integrating LMI into career advice to ensure young people understand emerging industries and opportunities in the Swansea Bay City Region, Celtic Freeports, and green energy sectors.
 - **Bias towards academic routes:** Vocational pathways are undervalued, with advice skewed heavily towards A-levels, often ignoring the benefits of vocational training or apprenticeships.
 - **Limited vocational awareness in schools:** Schools inconsistently understand or promote vocational training, and often fail to tailor the curriculum for learners at risk of becoming NEET.
 - **School priorities:** Sixth-form schools focus on retaining learners rather than providing impartial advice, limiting learners' awareness of all post-16 options.

- **Positive Developments:**
 - Collaborative initiatives such as the Sketty Hall Employer Board and Swansea area events demonstrate the potential of coordinated approaches with Careers Wales.
- **Recommendations:**
 - **Integration of Labour Market Information (LMI):** While it's noted that Careers Wales lacks understanding of LMI, collaboration with colleges and local businesses could bridge this gap. Efforts should focus on integrating LMI into career advice to ensure young people understand emerging industries and opportunities in the Swansea Bay City Region, Celtic Freeports, and green energy sectors.
 - **Vocational Pathway Role Models:** Schools and Careers Advisors could benefit from the involvement of role models or industry ambassadors who have followed vocational routes to help normalise these pathways and demonstrate their success.
 - **National Audit of Career advice in schools:** Examining the parity between academic and vocational pathway promotion to highlight disparities and improve practice.

2. Effectiveness of Work Experience Opportunities

Work experience opportunities for compulsory school-age learners are inconsistent and often unstructured.

- **Barriers to Effectiveness:**
 - Administrative burdens such as health and safety risk assessments, public liability, and red tape deter schools from organising block placements.
 - Careers services no longer facilitate placements, and schools lack the resources to manage them.
 - Placements often lack alignment with learners' career aspirations and are based on convenience, such as placements with family or friends.
 - Equality of opportunity exist for learners who do not have parental support or connections to find placements that can offer real insight and value. This is particularly an issue in the medical sector, legal and financial sectors.
- **Potential Benefits:**
 - When meaningful work experience is arranged, learners report significant value in understanding workplace expectations and gaining insight into career options.
- **Recommendations:**

- **Flexible and Inclusive Work Experience Models:** Encourage schools and employers to explore more flexible options for work experience, including micro-placements, virtual work experience, and project-based learning that align with specific industries.
- **Strategic Employer Partnerships:** Models such as the *Cardiff Commitment* can support both employers and schools to establish meaningful collaborative opportunities that can include work experience, work related projects and awareness of career pathways. Funding to support a national development of this sort of model would address the lack career knowledge and the consequent thwarting of ambition for so many children in Wales.

3. Changes in Routes Post-18

Evidence of Changing Choices

There has been a reduction in learners opting for higher education (HE) in recent years, with financial, practical, and cultural factors influencing this trend:

- **Key Trends:**
 - Decline in HE enrolments (At Gower College Swansea our HE application numbers highlight this e.g 2021: 1,123, 2023: 810, 2025: 624 projected).
 - Many learners are now opting for apprenticeships or direct employment over university.
 - Despite this, Gower College Swansea data did demonstrate a slight recovery in 2024 (961 learners enrolled in HE, up from 810 in 2023).
- **Barriers to HE Participation:**
 - **Cost concerns:** Tuition fees and living expenses deter learners.
 - **Perceived value:** Questions about the employability benefits of a degree versus vocational routes.
 - **Preference for local institutions:** Most GCS learners who pursue HE choose South Wales universities (e.g., Swansea University). This is influenced by financial constraints, family pressure, and a preference for staying close to home.

4. Equity of Access

Some groups of learners face significant disadvantages in accessing post-16 education:

- **Barriers for Specific Groups:**

- **Financial barriers:** Complex funding applications and lack of parental support limit access to funding schemes (e.g., EMA, FCF).
 - **Travel challenges:** Learners often rely on multiple bus journeys, with costs being a significant barrier, particularly for ESOL learners and families just above funding thresholds.
 - **Resource gaps:** Some courses (e.g., plumbing, catering) require costly equipment and materials that are unaffordable even with FCF support.
 - **Gender disparities:** Gender imbalances persist in certain vocational areas.
 - **Young Carers:** Young carers require flexible learning schedules and additional pastoral support to balance education with their responsibilities.
 - **ALN Learners:** sufficient funding is required to ensure that each institution can meet the tailored support post 16 to enhance the access to education and training and ensure effective progression.
- **Support Available:**
 - GCS provides dedicated support through Student Support Officers, Pastoral Coaches, and Transition Teams. However, additional funding and resources are needed, particularly for ALN learners.
- **Regional Variation:**
 - Learners in areas without sixth forms generally receive better information on diverse pathways. Conversely, in schools with sixth forms, advice is often biased towards retaining learners.
 - Reduced choice – a number of school sixth form are unable to offer the breadth of academic and vocational pathways unlike Colleges leading to inequitable access for learners.
 - Poor outcomes – it is our experience that 5/7 sixth forms within our region consistently under-perform in terms of AS/A national comparators despite, pre-16 outcomes being of a good standard. Learners therefore are experience poor quality provision, leading to reduced outcomes affecting future success with the likelihood of them re-enrolling onto alternative provision the year later.

5. Post-16 Destination Data

While some data is available to inform post-16 education planning, significant gaps remain:

- **Available Data:**
 - Cohort trends for Year 11 school leavers.
 - StatsWales historical data on NEET learners and general learner trends.

- Datasets which collect predicted destinations based on best information informed by student indication and/or staff members knowledge of individuals.
- **Data Gaps:**
 - Insufficient data on learners with ALN, Welsh-language learners, ESOL needs, and predicted enrolments by type of learner.
 - Data is reported to Welsh Government by schools and colleges, however both used different systems (Schools continue to submit PLASC for post 16, Colleges submit LLWR for post 16; Work Based Learning providers also submit a LLWR data return which will include post 16 learners. This leads to lack of coherence and presents challenges on the ability to track and monitor progression.
 - Datasets for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils are not broken down by subject and programme only by numbers on roll. This information could provide some indication of choices post 16.
 - Lack of granular, forward-looking data to inform curriculum planning and provision.
 - Effective datasets when learners leave post 16 education when it is not into HE. Through UCAS we can effectively track and report on the progression of our learners who progress onto HE, however, there is no reliable data to track learners who progress into further training or employment. It would require a significant internal investment in staff to obtain this information directly for each institution to do this directly, i.e through contacting leavers after leaving and returns are poor. (We have explored engaging with a third-party provider but they could only guarantee a 50% success rate).
- **Recommendations:**
 - To complement statistical data, it would be useful for institutions to collect qualitative insights on learner decisions, such as why they chose their pathway, barriers they faced, and satisfaction levels with their choice. This could provide valuable context for destination trends.
 - The development of predictive analytics tools to anticipate future demand for courses and skills based on historical data, LMI, and economic priorities.
 - Improved tracking systems to monitor the long-term outcomes of learners who become NEET, understanding what interventions are most effective in re-engaging them in education or training.
 - To join up systems to comprehensively track progression of post 16 and post 18 learners (i.e UCAS, HMRC, Jobseekers, etc)

6. Welsh Government's Role and Recommendations

The Welsh Government has made positive strides in funding post-16 progression, but significant challenges remain:

- **Strengths:**
 - Funding initiatives like EMA and ALG have supported learner participation.
 - Transformational leads work effectively with FE institutions, fostering collaboration.

- **Weaknesses:**
 - Inconsistent interventions in sixth-form schools, where learners are often unaware of the full range of post-16 options. No mandate for sixth forms to work with college to ensure equitable access of information and choice of post-16 pathways.
 - Limited awareness among learners and families about initiatives such as the Young Person's Guarantee.

- **Recommendations:**
 - Mandate access to impartial, independent careers advice for all learners.
 - Allocate designated funding to support collaboration between schools and colleges.
 - Standardise feedback mechanisms to assess the quality of careers guidance.
 - Require Estyn inspections to explicitly evaluate how schools inform learners about all post-16 options.
 - Enhance data-sharing between schools, colleges, and Welsh Government to improve post-16 planning.
 - More accessible travel funding including for learners who are over 25.

Conclusion

While Gower College Swansea acknowledges the progress made by Welsh Government in supporting post-16 education, there remain critical challenges in ensuring equitable access, informed choices, and meaningful support for all learners. Addressing systemic barriers, fostering collaboration, and prioritising the needs of learners over institutional competition are essential to improving post-16 transitions in Wales.

