
**COLEGAUCYMRU POLICY ASKS FOR
THE NEXT WELSH GOVERNMENT**

**THEME 1: EXPANDING CITIZENS' ENTITLEMENT
AND ENGAGEMENT WITH EDUCATION**

March 2021

This briefing expands on Theme 1 of ColegauCymru's *Further Success: Policy Recommendations for the next Welsh Government in Post-16 Education and Lifelong Learning in Wales*. Together with our *Enabling Renewal: Further Education and Building Better Citizenship, Occupations and Business Communities in Wales* report, these documents present a vision and practical action for further education in Wales.¹

Summary

ColegauCymru highlights the need to expand citizens' engagement with education by changing the statutory basis for post-16 education and by providing a digital entitlement to learning.

With this in mind, the next Welsh Government should:

- Change the statutory basis of education to allow for funded entitlement to access a first Level 3 qualification in Welsh or English up to and including all those to age 25, in the first instance, with a commitment to extending this entitlement to all adults. As part of this, raise the age of compulsory engagement with education or training to 18, including the necessary access to independent advice and guidance for all learners.
- Build on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and the consequential impact on 14-19 learning pathways to provide a legal basis for learners aged 14-16 to progress to vocational and technical pathways provided independently via Further Education Institutions (FEIs), and the necessary funding to support these learners. The delivery of vocational general education qualifications should be reserved for schools and colleges with the specific designation as centres for initial technical and vocational learning.
- Introduce a 'digital entitlement' for all learners – a future Welsh Government should commit to providing digital devices for all learners and using all means available to improve access to high-speed internet across all parts of Wales. As part of this, the provision of appropriate spaces for learners to study must also be taken into consideration.
- Commit to and deliver a three-year budget for further education.

¹ John Buchanan et al., *Enabling Renewal: Further Education and Building Better Citizenship, Occupations and Business Communities in Wales*, ColegauCymru, 2021, available at: <https://www.colleges.wales/image/publications/reports/Enabling%20Renewal%20-%20FE/Enabling%20Renewal%20-%20FE.pdf>

Changing the statutory basis and age of education

Level 3 qualification for all citizens

Obtaining a Level 3 (equivalent to an A Level general qualification), rather than a Level 2 qualification has a positive impact on earnings. Research shows that citizens between 16-24 with a Level 3 qualification enjoy an earnings premium compared to those that have a Level 2 qualification. Males with a Level 3 qualification earn 15% more, and females 9% more by age 26.² This pay gap is more profound compared to those with no qualifications. Likewise, education has a positive impact on health – the more educated and skilled a person is, the more likely they are to report better health even when compared with individuals with similar background characteristics.³

Changing the statutory age of education or training to 18

The Education Act 1996 states that ‘...the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive suitable, efficient full-time education up until the age of 16’. Post-16, whilst learners are encouraged to continue with education or training, there is no legal requirement for young people to undertake a continued educational offer.⁴

As more young people choose to continue to stay in education after the age of 16, Colegau Cymru advocates raising the compulsory age of engagement with education to 18. On an individual basis, this will afford learners better opportunities to develop their skills and training options to improve career prospects, and recognises the choices that in practice, are already made by most young people. Additionally, it increases the likelihood of attaining future workplace training, working in more skilled areas, and therefore increasing career earnings.⁵ Additionally, raising the compulsory education age has a positive wider societal impact. Individuals who stay in education or training until 18 are less likely to be involved in anti-social behaviour and are likely to experience better physical and mental health than those who do not.⁶

The focus of the legislative change must be on ensuring *engagement* with education, and ensuring that each individual can find the education, skills, apprenticeship or other path that is right for them. Currently 7.8% of 16-18 year olds in Wales are not in education, employment or training, a figure

² Independent Panel Report, *Review of Post-18 Education and Funding* (May 2019), p51, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805127/Review_of_post_18_education_and_funding.pdf.

³ See [How do our education and skills influence our health? | The Health Foundation](#)

⁴ UK Public General Acts, *Learning and Skills Act* (2000), <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/21/section/32>

⁵ Department for Education and Skills, *Raising Expectations: Staying in education and training post-16* (2007), p11, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/325656/Cm_7065_-_Raising_Expectations.pdf

⁶ Department for Education and Skills, *Raising Expectations: Staying in education and training post-16* (2007), p13.

which has only dropped slightly since 2004.⁷ The next Welsh Government must take steps to address this, and lower this figure further, and raising the age of compulsory engagement with education is a workable solution⁸.

Access to independent advice for all learners

All learners must be able to access independent career, and career progression advice, when thinking about their post-16 choices. This cannot be left until Year 11. Pre-16 learners should receive independent and tailored advice that encourages best outcomes at a sufficiently early stage to enable this. Research shows a disconnect between the aspirations of young people aged 14-18 across the UK when compared with the types of jobs available.⁹ Learners should actively be encouraged to pursue vocational or academic qualifications, depending on their skills and interests. FEIs should be at the forefront of this educational offer.

Unnecessary competition should be ended with the focus being what is in the best interests of each individual learner. Provision, in statute, must be made to highlight the role of FEIs alongside school sixth forms as outstanding education environments with high quality levels of teaching and learning.

This focus on independent advice should carry through into later life. Adult learners seeking to reskill and upskill should be able to access independent career advice so that they can make informed decisions regarding potential career prospects. The Welsh Government's current 'Working Wales' initiative seeks to fulfil this function, linked to Careers Wales.¹⁰ We must ensure smooth integration of advice services for citizens of all ages.

⁷ Statistics for Wales, *Statistical Bulletin*, 'Young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) October 2019 to September 2020', <https://gov.wales/young-people-not-education-employment-or-training-neet-october-2019-september-2020>

⁸ *Raising the Age of Participation to 18* (February 2021) <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Raising-the-Age-of-Participation-to-18.pdf>. Colegau Cymru is pleased to see engagements on the issue of raising the statutory age of education in Wales, and will follow any progress closely.

⁹ See Nick Chambers, Chris Percy and Martin Rogers, *Disconnected: Career aspirations and jobs in the UK* (Education and Employers, 2020), <https://www.educationandemployers.org/disconnected/>

¹⁰ <https://workingwales.gov.wales>

Providing a legal basis for 14-16 year olds to progress onto vocational and technical pathways

The next Welsh Government must provide a secure legal basis for learners aged 14-16 to progress onto vocational and technical pathways provided by FEIs, where this is the best and most appropriate option for learners. Alongside this, the necessary funding to support these learners must be made available on an ongoing basis. In practice, provision is already in place to provide some 14-16 year olds with vocational learning. This however, this is not securely or adequately resourced.

Safeguarding of these younger learners must remain a priority. Primarily, the legal responsibility of a child whose normalised learning setting is an FEI should sit with the college Principal. This helps to safeguard the education and wellbeing of the child. This should be recognised in law as a Wales-specific provision.

Junior Apprenticeships

Jointly funded by Welsh Government Creative Solutions, Cardiff and Vale College, Cardiff Council and Cardiff schools, the Junior Apprenticeship programme was launched in September 2016. Whilst studying a Junior Apprenticeship, learners must follow core elements of the national curriculum such as GCSE Maths and English/Welsh whilst also developing industry skills and qualifications. In 2017, Welsh Government pledged £800,000 funding into developing junior apprenticeship programmes¹¹. However, besides this grant, this provision is funded through the existing post-16 allocation. As FEIs are responsible for providing junior apprenticeships, a distinct funding pot should 'follow the learner' rather than following the education institution to ensure that the relevant provider is able to deliver resources to support the learner.

Cardiff and Vale College were the first to pilot the Junior Apprenticeship programme in 2016, with further provision rolled out across a number of colleges in Wales in the academic 2018/19 year. The details of the programme and examples of how it has benefited young learners can be found in a short video created by Cardiff and Vale College¹²

¹¹ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-expansion-junior-apprenticeship-programme>

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkqWh1M1Q_g&feature=emb_logo

Delivery of vocational education

The 2018-2019 Estyn report noted that FEIs perform well in responding to regional skills needs and were identified to be meeting and exceeding teaching and learning standards.¹³ Additionally, FEIs provide high quality and unique learning environments such as the *Centre of Excellence for Railway Training* at Coleg y Cymoedd. Due to these high standard learning environments, FEIs should lie at the heart of providing vocational qualifications. All vocational courses should be taught to the highest standard, requiring appropriately qualified and experienced staff who can make full use of high-quality facilities. For this reason, only those schools and colleges who meet such high standards should be permitted to deliver vocational general education qualifications. Provision should require specific designation as a centre for initial technical and vocational learning. The terms of the designation of schools or colleges as centres for Initial Vocational Education and Training should be included in any reform of post-16 or 16-25 education.

Additionally, unnecessary competition for delivering vocational qualifications should be avoided. Education authorities should actively be encouraged to form partnerships between school sixth forms and FEIs in order to ensure that the vocational provision on offer affords learners with the best opportunities for development and career progression.

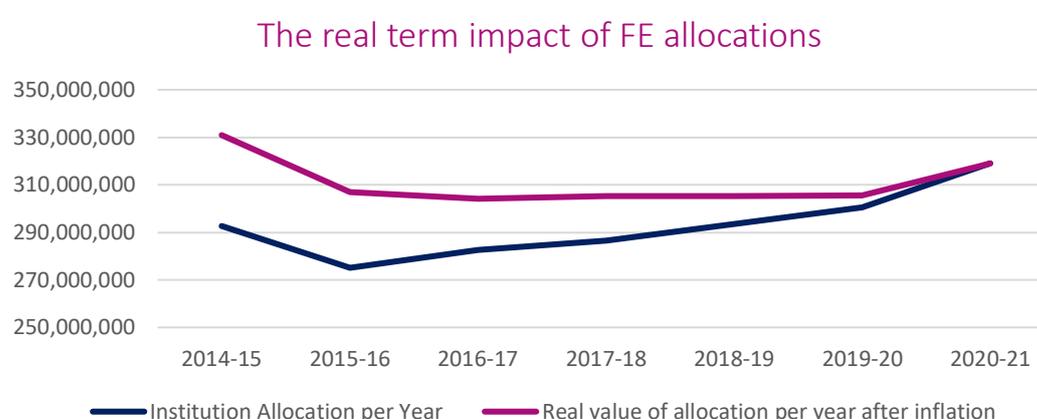
¹³ Estyn, 'The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales 2018-2019, https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/www.estyn.gov.wales/files/2020-07/Annual_Report_2018_2019_en_2.pdf, p61

Digital entitlement

In 2010, the Welsh Government set out their strategy to *Deliver a Digital Wales* by 2020 whereby ‘everyone would be able to enjoy the benefits of digital technology’.¹⁴ However, the COVID-19 crisis has exposed shortcomings regarding this issue in further education. Real term cuts to further education funding have presented a number of challenges.

Figure 1.1 outlines the real term cuts to funding provision since 2014/15 using a compound average from the Consumer Price Index (CPI) measure.

Figure 1.1



This chart, which does not include any additional funding in response to the pandemic, shows that once inflation is taken into account, despite allocations seemingly increasing since 2014-15, they have actually decreased in real terms. Additionally, the pandemic has uncovered the multifaceted nature of what digital entitlement in Wales means.

Access to equipment

One of the most pressing issues regarding digital entitlement is providing learners and practitioners with access to *adequate* equipment. In July 2020, £3.2 million was provided by Welsh Government to purchase additional digital equipment for further education learners, work-based learning learners, and adult learners¹⁵. However, there are still significant shortfalls in the provision of ICT equipment in FEIs. ColegauCymru calls on the next Welsh Government to ensure that all learners have access to a digital device to enable them to take part in learning.

¹⁴ Welsh Government, *Delivering a Digital Wales: The Welsh Assembly Government’s Outline Framework for Action* (2010), <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/delivering-a-digital-wales.pdf>.

¹⁵ <https://gov.wales/over-50-million-support-welsh-universities-colleges-and-students>

Additionally, access to equipment should be a personalised process according to learner needs as opposed to just equipping all learners with a standardised laptop. If provision of equipment is managed according to individual learner profile, further accessibility issues can be addressed. When necessary, software such as speech recognition and dictation should be installed onto laptops to improve accessibility for learners with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) for example. In 2018/19, there were 16,510 unique learners in FEIs who self-identified as having a learning difficulty and/or disability, many of whom would have benefited from such an approach.¹⁶

Learners should be encouraged to consider using Welsh language settings when setting up devices where they are sufficiently competent in order to boost their linguistic skills. This would also extend to using Welsh language software to use functions such as spell check.

Additionally, all learning materials should be digitalised in Welsh. This improves accessibility, and helps FEIs to meet Welsh Language Standards. Whilst resources are currently less frequently published in Welsh, the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated expansion in online/blended learning should be seen as an opportunity to pool resources and deliver far more blended resources bilingually.

Broadband access

Broadband in Wales is not devolved as the UK Government has primary responsibility for policy, however Welsh Government has other powers to take action.¹⁷

The Access Broadband Cymru scheme was launched in 2017 to offer grants to fund, or part fund installation costs of new broadband connections for homes and businesses in Wales.¹⁸ It is estimated that 95.6% of residencies in Wales have access to *superfast* levels of broadband.¹⁹ This means that approximately 15,500 homes in Wales are without 'decent broadband'.²⁰ Based on the average persons per household figures in Wales, this means that approximately 35,100 people do not have access to broadband at home.²¹

¹⁶ <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Further-Education/uniquelearnersenrolledfurthereducationinstitutions-by-primarydisability-gender>

¹⁷ Welsh Government, *About Broadband in Wales*, <https://gov.wales/broadband-in-wales/about-broadband-in-wales>

¹⁸ Think Broadband, *UK Broadband Coverage & Speedtest Result Maps*, <https://labs.thinkbroadband.com/local/index.php?tab=2&election=1#8/52.019/-2.112/con/nonsuperfast/>, [Accessed 05/06/2020].

¹⁹ Think Broadband, *UK Broadband Coverage & Speedtest Result Maps*, <https://labs.thinkbroadband.com/local/index.php?tab=2&election=1#8/52.019/-2.112/con/nonsuperfast/>, [Accessed 05/06/2020].

²⁰ Ofcom, *Latest Broadband and Mobile Coverage Figures for Wales Revealed (2019)*, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/media/media-releases/2019/latest-broadband-and-mobile-coverage-figures-for-wales-revealed>.

²¹ Stats Wales, *Average household size (persons) by local authority and year* [Accessed 15/06/2020], <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Households/Estimates/averagehouseholdsize-by-localauthority-year>.

Welsh Government's support in providing 11,000 MiFi devices to help learners get online is welcomed.²² However, continued support is required as emphasised by a 'Children in Wales' survey which showed that 40% of low income families are still missing at least one essential resource to support their child's learning from home needs.²³

Many areas which suffer from poor connectivity are situated in rural areas of Wales. These are often areas where there is a high concentration of Welsh speakers. Therefore, additional consideration needs to be taken for learners in these areas who risk digital and linguistic marginalisation.

Digital competence and training

It is essential to differentiate between digital competence for recreational use, and digital competence for accessing systems and programs to complete work. 89% of those aged 16+ in Wales and 98% of those aged 16-49 use the internet.²⁴ Prior to the pandemic, a Welsh Government survey showed that just 43% of the Welsh population had used video chat functions however.²⁵ In the current climate this is integral to digital learning and is indicative of the digital competence issues being faced by learners. It appears that there is a notion of assumed knowledge amongst learners, despite a lack of formal training.

Additionally, it is essential to provide training on systems being used by FEIs to ensure that all learners are able to access learning. This training should also encourage learners to maximise device capabilities. Learners should be made aware of features such as enlarging font sizes and accessing proof reading services.

Digital competence and training is also an issue faced by teaching staff in FEIs. As course syllabuses and structures have remained the same, there are many issues regarding lesson planning and ensuring sufficient staff confidence in delivering content differently. A recent UK-wide survey noted that 49% of teaching staff were not confident that they would be able to deliver the quality of teaching that they expected of themselves.²⁶

²² Welsh Government, '50 online logins a second and other ways that show how Wales is leading the way in digital services to support remote learning', *press release* [Accessed 19/01/2021], <https://gov.wales/50-online-learning-logins-second-and-other-ways-show-how-wales-leading-way-digital-services-support>.

²³ Welsh Government, *Draft Budget 2021-22 Protect, Build, Change*, (2020), p56, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-12/2021-2022-draft-budget-narrative.pdf>.

²⁴ Welsh Government, *Statistical Bulletin: National Survey for Wales, 2018-19 Internet use and digital skills*, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-09/internet-use-and-digital-skills-national-survey-wales-april-2018-march-2019-207.pdf>.

²⁵ Welsh Government, *Statistical Bulletin: National Survey for Wales, 2018-19 Internet use and digital skills*, <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-09/internet-use-and-digital-skills-national-survey-wales-april-2018-march-2019-207.pdf>.

²⁶ JISC, *Shaping the digital future of FE and skills* (2020), p13, <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/sites/default/files/shaping-the-digital-future-of-fe-and-skills-report.pdf>.

Learning environment

Even where learners have competent skills and access to provision, there remain digital entitlement issues regarding learning space for many. With the potential of family, housemates, or partners also working from home, the issue of space and an adequate learning environment is essential.

Additionally, Welsh Government have recently announced an aim for 30% of the workforce to work remotely in future to attain a better work-life balance.²⁷ As such, other household members may occupy learning space meaning that learners do not have an adequate study area.

To counter these issues, it is essential to use and promote community spaces such as hubs, community centres and public libraries provided they are COVID-19 compliant. It is also important to remember that learners have different learning styles and that practical based courses require higher levels of face-to face learning, often in workshop environments. Therefore, this method remains an important aspect of teaching and learning and is essential for many courses. Support must continue to be provided to FEIs to ensure the conditions for this type of provision are in place and safe for everyone involved.

Health and wellbeing

Online delivery brings about both challenges and benefits regarding wellbeing. FEIs have noted the benefits of using technology to encourage digital competence and using the internet to contact friends and family.

However, there are also wellbeing concerns regarding digital learning. Colleges have noted that digital burnout was a real issue amongst learners, and that digital learning should also involve asynchronous (“catch up” or “on demand”) methods of learning. This type of learning can be especially useful to those such as carers who will benefit from such opportunities. ‘Burnout’ among learners should be seen in a wider context where research from London South Bank University in 2020 showed that remote working generally leads to increased tiredness or ‘Zoom fatigue’ for employees and a greater need for longer recovery time compared with on-site office work. Similarly, communication via video calls is more tiring to deal with than other forms of digital communication, such as emails, texts, or chats, as video calls require higher levels of self-control and regulation of emotion.²⁸

The issue of language choice also plays an important role in wellbeing. Wellbeing services should be available in Welsh to ensure that learners whose first language is Welsh can access services in their language of choice.

²⁷ Welsh Government, *Press Release: Aim for 30% of the Welsh workforce to work remotely* (13/09/2020), <https://gov.wales/aim-30-welsh-workforce-work-remotely>.

²⁸ See ‘Zoom fatigue is a thing’, *Personnel Today* (November 2020), <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/zoom-fatigue-is-a-thing-study-shows>.

Delivering a three year budget

Further education is currently funded on a yearly allocation model based by multiplying the three year 'average return rate in schools' by the average funding value per learner for each local authority. This baseline allocation is then supplemented by financial uplifts and inconsistent project funding.²⁹ This funding formula does not allow for colleges to efficiently plan, and due to changing local demographics, the sector has suffered from underfunding in recent years. Therefore, the next Welsh Government should enable further education to move towards a three year indicative funding model.³⁰

A three-year funding model would assist FEIs in forward-planning and budgeting. Despite sharing common goals, FEIs are individual entities with unique commercial income streams and diverse staff teams. Additionally, as highlighted by the response to COVID-19, FEIs need to be adaptable, and sometimes financially reactive.

By moving to a three-year allocation model, FEIs would be better able to make contingency plans for emergencies, and react to changing environments. Finally, this change would provide greater surety to improve sector confidence.

²⁹ Joseph Champion, *A quick guide to post-16 education funding*, (2018), <https://senedd.wales/research%20documents/18-028/18-028-web-english.pdf>, p2.

³⁰ Wales Audit Office, *Welsh Government oversight of further-education colleges' finances and delivery* (2017), https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/FE-finances-eng-2017_7.pdf.

This briefing is the first in a series of five covering each of the themes identified in *Further Success: Policy Recommendations for the next Welsh Government In Post-16 Education and Lifelong Learning for Wales*.



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