

Agenda – Children, Young People and Education Committee

Meeting Venue: **Hybrid – Committee room 4 Senedd and video conference via Zoom**

Meeting date: 6 February 2025

Meeting time: 09.30

For further information contact:

Naomi Stocks

Committee Clerk

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Hybrid

Private pre-meeting

09.15 – 09.30

Public meeting

09.30 – 13.15

1 Introductions, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

09.30

2 Medr – Annual Scrutiny session

09.30 – 10.30

(Pages 1 – 28)

Simon Pirotte, Chief Executive Officer, Medr

James Owen, Chief Operating Officer, Medr

Attached Documents:

Research brief

Paper Medr

Funding Assumptions for Academic Year 2025/26

Break

10.30 – 10.40



- 3 Routes into post-16 education and training – evidence session 3**
10.40 – 11.10 (Pages 29 – 49)
Simon Pirotte, Chief Executive Officer, Medr
Rhian Edwards, Executive Director for Policy, Medr
Attached Documents:
Response from Medr
- 4 Routes into post-16 education and training – evidence session 4**
11.15 – 12.15 (Pages 50 – 88)
Nerys Bourne, Director of Customer Strategy and Service Development,
Careers Wales
Mark Owen, Head of Services to Stakeholders, Careers Wales
Attached Documents:
Research Brief
Response from Careers Wales
- 5 Routes into post-16 education and training – evidence session 5**
12.15 – 13.15 (Pages 89 – 109)
Lisa Mytton, Strategic Director, National Training Federation for Wales [via
zoom]
Dr Ben Calvert, Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Wales and Vice-
Chair of Universities Wales [via zoom]
Amanda Wilkinson, Director of Universities Wales [via zoom]
Attached Documents:
Response from National Training Federation Wales (NTFW)
Response from Universities Wales
- 6 Papers to note**
13.15
- 6.1 General scrutiny of Ministers with responsibility for health and social care**
(Pages 110 – 111)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee and the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Minister for Children and Social Care

6.2 Children on the margins

(Pages 112 – 129)

Attached Documents:

Welsh Government response to the Committee's report 'Children on the margins'

6.3 Children on the margins

(Page 130)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Chief Executive of NYAS Cymru

6.4 Child Poverty

(Page 131)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Chair the Equality and Social Justice Committee

6.5 Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill

(Pages 132 – 134)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee from the Fostering Network

6.6 Information from Stakeholders

(Page 135)

Attached Documents:

Report from the Royal Society of Chemistry on the Future Workforce and Educational Pathways

6.7 Information from Stakeholders

(Pages 136 – 138)

Attached Documents:

Letter to the Minister for Social Care from the Expert Advisory Group on Childcare (EAGC)

7 Motion under Standing Order 17.42(ix) to resolve to exclude the public from the remainder of this meeting

13.15

Private meeting

13.15 – 13.30

8 Routes into post-16 education and training – consideration of the evidence

13.15 – 13.30

(Pages 139 – 142)

Attached Documents:

Private paper – Use of Committee slots on 13 and 20 March 2025

Document is Restricted

Medr

Y Comisiwn Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil
Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

Children, Young People and Education Committee: Medr - Annual Scrutiny session

Written submission

January 2025



Noddir gan
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Children, Young People and Education Committee: Medr - Annual Scrutiny session

Written submission

January 2025

How the last year of setting up the new Commission has gone

The establishment of Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, is the culmination of a long process of change. Through the development period of the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022, the sector we now fund and regulate have followed the development of a new approach in Wales for many years.

After the appointment of Professor Dame Julie Lydon in December 2022, the Minister for Education appointed Simon Pirotte OBE as the first Chief Executive Officer in June 2023. Following the subsequent appointment of seven Board Members, the Commission was established on 4 September 2023 to begin preparations for it to become operational the following year. The Chief Executive was joined by a small 'establishment team' of officials from the Welsh Government. That team, working with existing teams in scope for transfer in the Welsh Government and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), set the groundwork for a successful establishment of the new organisation.

Medr 'went live' on 1 August 2024, dissolving HEFCW and incorporating the existing staff and functions of that organisation and the Welsh Government in a new arm's-length body. Alongside the transfer of staff from HEFCW and the Welsh Government, Medr has continued to build capacity in the organisation since it became operational. There has been considerable interest in people applying to work for Medr and we have already recruited around 25 people with more recruitment activity planned in the coming months.

What's the internal structure of the organisation in terms of how the different parts of the tertiary education sector are overseen

Medr is more than the combined responsibilities of HEFCW and the Welsh Government. One of the key drivers behind the creation of a single organisation with oversight for the entire tertiary sector was to create a more joined-up system, with clearer and more flexible pathways for learners.

In order to do that, and to encourage our staff to develop a tertiary mindset, we have avoided structuring our organisation according to different parts of the sector. This will ensure that there is join up across the sector and avoid the individual parts becoming siloed.

The executive team includes the Chief Executive, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director for Policy. The senior leadership team is comprised of the executive team and seven additional director-level posts, which are: Director of Research, Innovation and Skills; Director of Learner Experience; Director of Development, Investment and Performance; Director of Regulation; Director of Statistics and Analysis; Chief Financial Officer and Chief Digital Officer.

How the transition of Medr taking over responsibility for tertiary education and research in August went

We are very pleased with the transition from existing responsibilities to Medr. Following the appointments of the Chair and Chief Executive, both were clear in engagements with the sector that a smooth transition was of paramount importance to our organisation, and recognised its vital importance for the sector.

Following its establishment in August 2024, Medr made £86million of scheduled payments to the sector in the month of August and a full payroll run was made on schedule for Medr staff. We are not aware of any issues or complaints arising from the transition to Medr's operational responsibilities.

Engagement with stakeholders on its strategic plan in response to the statement of strategic priorities from the Welsh Ministers

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 sets out that the Commission must prepare a strategic plan setting out how it intends to discharge its strategic duties, and address the Welsh Ministers' statement of priorities. It also notes that in preparing the plan, the Commission must consult such persons as it considers appropriate.

Engagement with stakeholders was key to the development of our strategic plan. In July 2024, we held engagement events in Llandudno and Cardiff, where we invited stakeholders from across the tertiary education and research sector to give their views on our strategic direction in response to the statement of priorities. These were attended by over 150 people and were used to inform the development of our draft strategic plan.

We held a public consultation on the draft plan from 23 September to 25 October. We received 101 responses to the consultation, including responses from every part of the sector. During the consultation period, we held a bespoke employer engagement session and commissioned Beaufort Research to carry out engagement with learners across the tertiary sector.

We actively involved our workforce in the development of our plan by sharing early drafts and holding briefing sessions with teams to inform the development of our aims and commitments.

The views expressed in the consultation responses, in the employer and learner engagement sessions, and by staff, were all considered carefully and reflected in the plan where possible. A final version of the plan, adapted to incorporate the feedback of stakeholders through the consultation and engagement process, was submitted to the Welsh Government in December 2024 and is currently being considered by Welsh Ministers.

Funding arrangements for providers and how it's anticipated that Medr will allocate funding in the future

As mentioned earlier, a smooth transition to the new regulatory and funding arrangements under Medr has been one of our immediate priorities.

In the short term, the funding powers and arrangements utilised by Medr are the same or similar to those employed by the Welsh Government or HEFCW. Initial funding allocations – for example, the funding provided to Local Authorities – have been made using existing funding models and formulae.

In the medium and longer term, we will consult on new systems of funding that will ensure our funding is used as effectively as possible. Using our funding effectively will be a crucial part of how we achieve our ambitions and realise the benefits of a coherent tertiary education and research sector, and data will be key to this. By better understanding the difference our funding can make, we will take considered, data-informed decisions on spending.

Medr is finalising its indicative budget allocations for 2025/26 and a high-level summary will be provided to the sector on 31 January. A copy will also be provided to the Committee at the same time.

How does Medr expect to receive funding from Welsh Government and does it anticipate that any funding will be ringfenced

The draft budget allocation that Medr has received from the Welsh Government has ringfenced funding for apprenticeships and for junior apprenticeships. Although this draft indicative budget may be subject to change at the final budget stage, we do not currently anticipate that any further parts of Medr's budget will be ringfenced.

As Medr continues to establish itself and consults on and implements its new systems of funding, it is possible that the budget that the Welsh Government provides to Medr may be entirely un-hypothecated.

Medr

Y Comisiwn Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil
Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

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31 January 2025

To:

Heads of higher education institutions
Heads of further education institutions
Apprenticeship leads
Directors of education

Dear colleagues,

Funding assumptions for academic year 2025/26

This document sets out, in broad terms, the funding assumptions that underlie the planned distribution of Medr's budget.

These proposals are based on the draft Welsh Government budget published in December 2024 and the subsequent Indicative Funding Letter received in January 2025.

The final Funding Letter is expected before the end of March 2025. Currently, we do not anticipate that there will be significant changes to the assumptions set out here on receipt of that letter.

The funding proposals in this document are presented with the caveats that the allocations for 2025/26 academic year from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026 (AY) may be adjusted if the Welsh Government revises the 2025-26 financial year from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 (FY) Medr budget line.

The indicative budget was considered by the Medr Board at its January meeting. Prior to the final budget being approved by Welsh Government (27 February 2025) leading to Medr's formalising and publishing our final allocations in April 2025.

Confirmation of the final funding allocations at an institutional/provider level will be subject to the availability of quality assured and verified data used to inform the agreed funding methodologies.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg, ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence in Welsh will be answered in Welsh, and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

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The settlement

Details of Medr's settlement for the financial year 2025-26 are presented in Table 1. The Welsh Government budget figures are for a financial year from April to March.

Budget area	Net resource budget
Education	£804,681,000
<i>Of which: 14-16 junior apprenticeships</i>	<i>£600,000</i>
Apprenticeships	£143,277,000
Net revenue budget:	£947,958,000
Non-cash (depreciation)	£437,000
Resource budget	£948,395,000
Higher education capital	£10,000,000
Further education digital capital	£3,000,000
Medr implementation capital	£500,000
Capital budget	£13,500,000
Total resource and capital budget:	£961,895,000
<i>Grant in Aid adjustments:</i>	
<i>Less non-cash (depreciation)</i>	<i>£437,000</i>
Total Grant-in-Aid (Cash)	£961,458,000

Indicative allocation of the Medr Budget

In deploying the 2025-26 budget it should be noted that allocations to tertiary education and research providers are predominantly allocated on an academic year basis. Therefore, the 2025-26 financial year budget must first take account of the known cash requirement to meet the remaining 2024/25 academic year funding commitments placed on the Medr budget by previous Ministerial and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) Council decisions.

In the same way, in agreeing 2025/26 academic year allocations, a similar commitment will be placed on the 2026-27 financial year budget, which has not yet been set by the Welsh Government.

Medr operating costs are not detailed separately in the Welsh Government budget. Before the academic year allocations are derived, Medr's forecast operating costs are deducted.

A number of funding lines have been ring-fenced in direct support of specific activity. In 2025-26 this relates to apprenticeships provision of £143,277,000 and junior apprenticeship provision of £600,000.

The Welsh Government has given particular 'steers' as to the deployment of the budget, which are included in the published [Children, Young People and Education Committee: Evidence paper on Draft Budget 2025-26](#).

Indicative allocation of the financial year budget

The indicative allocation presents a proposed budget based on the current information available regarding budget line obligations. It includes all the funding that we expect to receive from the Welsh Government at the time of writing.

	£ million
Cash requirement to meet the commitments of 2024/25 allocations as agreed by the Minister for Further and Higher Education	159.410
Cash requirement to meet the commitments of 2024/25 allocations as agreed by HEFCW Council	68.805
Operating budget *	16.128
Ring-fenced budget for apprenticeships	143.277
Ring-fenced budget for junior apprenticeships	0.600
Core budgets **	531.967
Strategic budgets	29.333
Capital budgets	13.500
Total	961.458

*£1.562 million of the £16.128 million operating budget will be released to the sector in 2025/26 as Medr continues to grow towards its agreed operating model.

** within the financial year a total of £21 million has been identified to recognise increased participation in the 16-19 cohort. This will be allocated upon receipt of in-year data returns to ensure increased participation has been evidenced.

Conversion of financial year budget to an academic year allocation

In order to arrive at academic year allocations, the allocation of the Welsh Government budget has been converted to an academic year. In most cases this is calculated using a proportion of the current draft FY budget (around 60%) and a balancing proportion (40%)

of the next year's FY budget. This may vary depending on sector with both further education (FE) and apprenticeship operating on a 63/37 split.

	2024/25 £ million	2025/26 £ million
Ring-fenced: apprenticeship contract	134.520	134.520
Core: local authority sixth form*	116.664	116.853
Core: local authority Adult Community Learning*	6.479	6.479
Core: further education mainstream	409.066	422.826
Core: further education additional learning support	16.741	16.741
Core: further education Financial Contingency Fund	6.715	6.715
Core: higher education research and innovation ** 1	97.068	97.295
Core: higher education teaching funding ** 2	69.661	69.434
Core: degree apprenticeships	9.411	9.411
Strategic: access, well-being and inclusion ***	23.962	25.962
Strategic: employability and skills ***	3.320	3.320
Strategic: research and innovation***	1.733	2.000
Strategic: student/learner and workforce ***	8.254	8.254
Strategic: data and technology ***	3.993	3.993
Strategic: strategic developments	2.250	3.500
Capital: higher education	10.000	10.000
Capital: further education digital	3.000	3.000
Total	922.840	940.300

We draw attention in particular to the following:

* Historically, local authority sixth form and Adult Community Learning allocations have been derived on a financial year basis. For 2025/26, it is proposed that local authorities receive a 16 month allocation from April 2025 through July 2026, allowing Medr to move all tertiary core provision to an academic year budget cycle.

** At this point core higher education research and innovation and teaching funding have been calculated based on allocations using unverified data. This may result in slight variations, either way, when calculating final funding allocations using the most up-to-date verified data.

** Following the application of a one off £11 million pro rata reduction in 2024/25. As Welsh Government funding in 2025-26 does not reverse this cut, the figures presented in this table have been calculated based on the figure post-reduction, pro rated against each line for comparative purposes.

*** Strategic budgets are made up of strategic funding lines transferred to Medr from the Welsh Government and HEFCW. A total of 49 strategic funding lines have been grouped into six thematic budget lines. A largely cash flat budget has allowed for

1 This includes Quality Research (QR), postgraduate research (PGR) and Research Wales Innovation Fund (RWIF)

2 This includes full and part time premia, credit-based and per capita allocations.

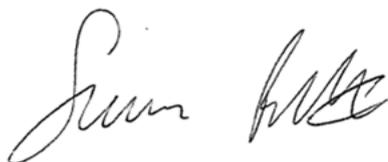
stability in the levels of funding with increases in the access, well-being and inclusion budget (£2 million to recognise the Welsh Government steer of a £2 million increase for mental health support) and the research and innovation budget. These groupings may change in subsequent years following evaluation of the purpose and outcomes of these strategic investments.

In addition, the proposals:

- Follow clear steers set out by the Welsh Government in relation to maintaining pay parity between teachers and FE lecturers.
- Align with founding phase of Medr's Strategic Plan in allocating all core allocations in line with previously approved funding methodologies.³
- Place a cash requirement of £331.286 million on the 2026-27 financial year budget in converting the 2025-26 financial year budget to a 2025/26 academic year allocation.

Where verified data allows, this funding assumptions note will be followed by indicative allocations at an institutional/provider level. Final academic year allocations will be provided to all tertiary providers following the Welsh Government's final budget and receipt of all verified data.

Yours sincerely,



Simon Pirotte
Chief Executive

³ In preparation for the growth phase of the strategic plan we anticipate early engagement with the sector before formally using powers to consult on funding methodology reviews where necessary.

Routes into post-16 education and training – inquiry by the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Medr written submission

January 2025



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Routes into post-16 education and training – inquiry by the Children, Young People and Education Committee

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Overview

Medr was established in August 2024 as the new funder and regulator of the tertiary education and research sector in Wales.

Its establishment was the culmination of a significant process of change. In 2016, Professor Ellen Hazelkorn recommended to the Welsh Government that it should establish a regulator to provide oversight of a combined tertiary education sector. The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 set the legislative basis for this change to happen, and is still in the process of being progressively enacted.

The establishment of a new arm's-length body for a combined tertiary education sector will have many positive impacts on how we fund and monitor our post-compulsory system – and the pathways in to and through the post-16 education system will be one of them.

Creating pathways that are clearer, more accessible, and easier to understand and navigate, will be a key part of Medr's work over the next five years. Our first strategic plan, which is currently under consideration by Welsh Ministers, sets out our core belief that learners thrive when they find the best learning for *them*: the right type, in the right place, and at the right time.

Medr is committed to its role in fostering a joined-up system that enables our learners to successfully identify and access the post-16 learning that is best for them and their futures.

Information on some of the specific questions posed by the inquiry is provided below, and we look forward to discussing with members.

Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options (vocational and academic routes post 16, i.e. further education, sixth form, apprenticeships and training, and onward to higher education)

The accessibility and awareness of different tertiary education routes is important to Medr. A central tenet of Medr's strategic plan will be creating one cohesive system that can be more easily understood and navigated by learners, providers and employers alike. One way that Medr will improve that system is by making it more collaborative, recognising the roles that both local authority-maintained school sixth forms and further education colleges play in our post-16 landscape, and ensuring that learners have both choice and high-quality provision.

We recognise the leading role that Careers Wales, schools and local authorities all play in providing advice and guidance to pre-16 learners, and Medr will be working to improve our understanding of the quality and nature of information provided to learners to inform their choices.

We set out a range of commitments in our draft strategic plan that will support us to do this, including the development of a learner engagement code and the establishment of a learner voice forum. These mechanisms, along with wider learner engagement activity through providers, will enable us to better understand learners' experiences of information, advice and guidance and – working with partners – help to improve the information that learners and prospective learners receive.

It is also crucial that information and guidance is available and effective for prospective learners throughout life. We recognise the importance of information provided at the transition moment from compulsory to post-compulsory education, but we are also mindful of the need to ensure we have a system that can be understood and accessed by people as they continue to train and re-train throughout their working lives.

Transition Funding

One example of a current intervention to improve information given to learners about their full range of options is the Transition Funding, initially provided by the Welsh Government and now funded through Medr.

For 2023/24, £3m of Transition funding was allocated to Local Authority Sixth Forms and FE Colleges for transition activities.

The purpose of this funding is to provide learners in years 10 and 11 with guidance on post-16 pathways to ensure that they understand all of the post-16 options available to them so that they are able to make an informed decision about the next step in their educational, training or employment pathway.

The funding allows for greater collaboration between schools and FE colleges and or/other schools and training providers. Where appropriate, activities may include a visit to an FE college, Independent Training provider, and/or any other post 16 provision, and could include participation in relevant transition activities at FE colleges, for example:

- **College Taster Days** - Learners have the opportunity to try out their preferred subjects in a bespoke taster session during the summer term.

- **Masterclasses or Interactive Workshops** - Learners have the opportunity to participate in subject-specific mini lectures or interactive workshops which link with a wide range of qualifications or careers in these areas.
- **Summer Programmes** - Learners are able to participate in a wide range of activities linked to vocational courses whilst developing positive relationships with their peers and college staff. These run in the summer holidays.

Schools have provided positive feedback and have reported increased activities relating to post-16 transition including options assemblies, attendance at careers fairs and motivational speakers. They have welcomed the flexibility to be able to utilise the funding for a range of events and activities that they would otherwise not have access to.

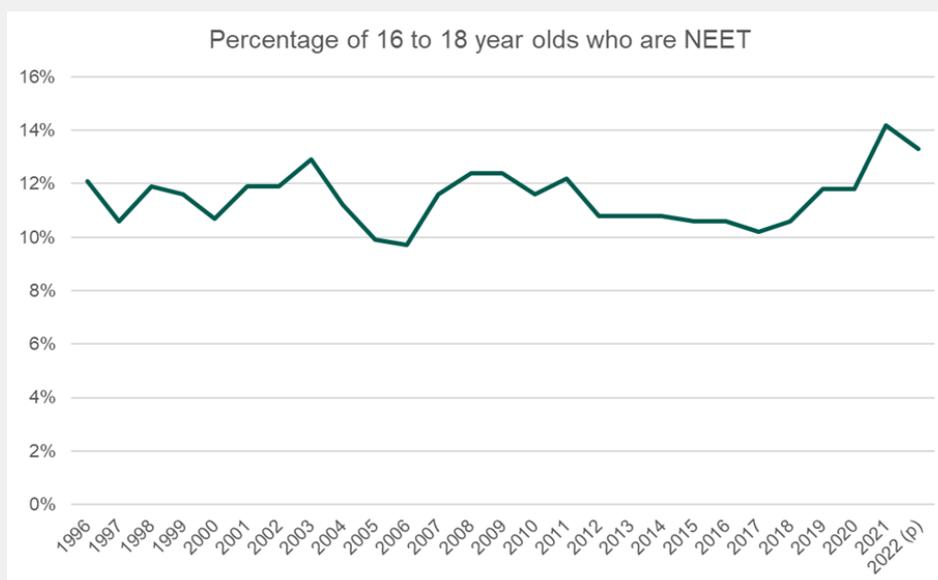
Colleges have reported equally positive feedback including the ability to reach more learners within schools, supporting them to make the right choice so that they are able to thrive and successfully achieve. They have welcomed the option to be able to trial new initiatives such as 'quiet enrolment sessions' to allow a comfortable environment for neuro-diverse learners.

A further £3m will be allocated in the coming weeks for transition activities for the 2024/25 academic year.

How effective careers support is at compulsory school age

Medr is one part of a wider system, and although we do not have responsibility for compulsory school age education, we recognise the importance of careers support for pre-16 learners as they think about transitioning to tertiary education.

Encouraging participation in tertiary education is a strategic duty for Medr set out in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022. The proportion of 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training has remained around or above 10% since the mid-nineties¹:



Medr is committed to reducing the number of NEETs in Wales, and more effective careers support at compulsory school age has a role to play in achieving this. However, we recognise that the persistently high level of NEETs in Wales is affected by a number of factors and will require a range of interventions to tackle.

One intervention to alleviate the number of young people who are disengaging from compulsory education is the Junior Apprenticeship Programme, which Medr funds. Junior Apprenticeships are not an apprenticeship but a form of vocational education and training for 14-16 year olds, which aim to keep learners most at risk of becoming NEET in education. Junior Apprenticeships are currently offered on a limited basis; Welsh ministers have indicated interest in extending this provision, and Medr will be working with them to explore how this aligns with other learning pathways into tertiary education.

Changes in routes post-18

Medr is committed to better understanding the participation picture across tertiary education and the factors influencing learners' ability to pursue different types of education and training. Our draft strategic plan sets out how we propose to work with partners to promote the benefits of

¹ [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\): July 2023 to June 2024 | GOV.WALES](#)

learning throughout life and to set targets to increase participation, particularly among those underrepresented in tertiary education.

The choices that learners are making at post-18 *may* be changing, but we would urge caution at drawing conclusions from the available data. We do not believe that there is conclusive data to suggest that there is a demonstrable shift from one part of the tertiary education sector to another. Medr will have an important role to play in improving our data and understandings of the choices learners are making – this is expanded on in the section on data below.

At present, there is not one set of data or analysis that presents a complete picture of participation across the tertiary education sector as a whole. The Welsh Government produces [statistics on participation in education by age](#), however there is insufficient granularity from which to draw further conclusions.

Published data for [learners in further education](#) is available up to 2022/23 and [apprenticeship starts](#) up to quarter 3 of 2023/24. These demonstrate downward trends in the numbers of 18 year olds enrolling in further education or starting an apprenticeship over the period of data available. However, we note that these data sets are not directly comparable to HESA enrolments and/or UCAS entry data.

More detail is available for higher education entry rates, and so we will examine that in further detail below.

The trends in the entry rate into higher education from Welsh-domiciled 18 year olds appear to have changed in recent years. The application rate from Welsh-domiciled learners to university has followed a broadly upwards trajectory over the period measured by UCAS, starting in 2006. In the UCAS End of Cycle data for 2024, the proportion of Welsh domiciled 18 year olds accepted into higher education was 30.1%. This is a small increase from the previous year, but is lower than the previous three years. More work is required to understand the factors influencing this.

We also note that although the broad upwards trajectory is shared with the UK as a whole, the entry rate and growth in Wales has been relatively lower since 2007.

From the available data between 2016 to 2022, the percentage of Welsh-domiciled 18 year olds enrolling to Welsh institutions has been consistently higher than those enrolling to institutions in the rest of the UK, though the gap has narrowed over the period. For the 2022/23 academic year, 50.7% of Welsh-domiciled 18 year olds enrolling to higher education enrolled at providers in Wales, as opposed to 49.3% at providers elsewhere in the UK. This represents a difference of 140 students.

UCAS data also provides opportunities to draw comparisons based on disadvantage (by using the different measures of deprivation across the UK) or on participation rates of local areas. Although there are limitations to either approach, both measures show a lower entry rate for Welsh 18 year olds in the lower quintiles (i.e. the most disadvantaged groups or those from neighbourhoods least likely to go into higher education) when compared with similar groups in England or Northern Ireland.

All WIMD quintiles had a generally increasing proportion of the population being accepted to higher education between 2015 and 2021. The proportion accepted since 2021 has dropped in all quintiles, although quintiles 2, 3 and 4 did see an increase between 2023 and 2024.

We have provided data that shows the relative performance of Wales in the indices of multiple deprivation across the U.K. in Annex A. However, this should be treated cautiously, as different parts of the UK use different methodologies to establish their respective index of multiple deprivation.

Welsh-medium provision

The provision of tertiary education through the medium of Welsh is an important part of Medr's duties. The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 requires us to: encourage demand for, and participation in, Welsh tertiary education provided through the medium of Welsh; take all reasonable steps to ensure that there is sufficient Welsh tertiary education provided through the medium of Welsh to meet demand; and encourage the provision of tertiary education through the medium of Welsh.

The Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol have been designated by Welsh Ministers to advise us on how we carry out our duties, and we work constructively with them and other stakeholders – such as Qualifications Wales – to ensure we meet our duties.

Our draft strategic plan sets out some of our commitments in relation to the Welsh language. These include the development and implementation of a national plan to increase and improve the provision and promotion of Welsh-medium education and assessment in tertiary education, and a commitment to increase the recruitment and retention of Welsh-speaking staff.

Welsh Government statistical analysis suggests that the type of tertiary education that learners at Welsh-medium or bilingual schools progress to impacts whether they continue learning in a Welsh-medium setting. Around half of learners in year 11 in 2020/21 from Welsh-medium or bilingual schools progressed to school sixth forms, of which the majority did so in a Welsh-medium or bilingual setting. Of the learners that progressed to a further education college, the vast majority did not undertake any of their courses entirely through the medium of Welsh, though many did engage in some form of bilingual learning.²

² [Ad-hoc statistical requests: 8 to 19 April 2024 | GOV.WALES](#)

Equity of access

Medr is committed to creating a coherent tertiary education system that removes barriers and enables learners to find the best learning for them.

The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 requires us to promote equality of opportunity, particularly through promoting increased participation in Welsh tertiary education and the carrying out of research and innovation by persons who are members of under-represented groups.

We want to focus the tertiary education system in Wales around the needs of the learner, and our draft strategic plan has commitments to establish regulatory conditions to advance equity and equality of opportunity.

Analysis published by the Welsh Government in 2022³ showed that rates of progression from Year 11 to post-16 education were lower for learners eligible for Free School Meals than those not eligible. The same analysis also showed a difference in overall progression to post-16 education between those living in the 10% most deprived areas of Wales and those living in the 10% least deprived.

Regardless of which deprivation measure is used, there are large differences in the choice of post-16 pathway. Of the learners that progressed from Year 11 to post-16 education in 2021/22, 63% of learners living in the 10% most deprived areas of Wales went on to study at an FE college, with a further 9% going into work-based learning, and 30% to school sixth forms. For learners living in the 10% least deprived areas, only 35% went on to an FE college and 3% went on to work-based learning. 63% went on to school sixth forms.

Post-16 outcomes are also lower for learners from deprived backgrounds, in particular for those undertaking general education learning programmes.⁴

Further information on the suggested causes and impacts of inequity in the tertiary education system is provided in Annex B, including reports and research that may be of interest to the Committee.

³ [Outcomes for learners in post-16 education affected by the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic: August 2020 to July 2021 | GOV.WALES](#)

⁴ [Consistent performance measures for post-16 learning \(achievement\): August 2022 to July 2023 | GOV.WALES](#)

Financial support

All universities provide a range of bursaries, scholarships and hardship funds for students experiencing socio-economic or other disadvantages. Regulated providers in Wales (universities and some colleges) commit to investing between 14% to 17% of fee and access income, including to secure student financial support.⁵ Regulated providers must make financial assistance and information about financial support available to students.

Medr allocates funding to regulated providers for student financial support.⁶ Medr guidance confirms it 'strongly encourage[s] universities and colleges, working with their Students' Unions or equivalent body, to build on measures to address the ongoing cost of living increases impacting on well-being and health, including mental and physical health.'

Medr also funds the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) to provide financial help to eligible learners who are experiencing financial hardship who might otherwise be unable to attend college. It can help with course-related costs such as childcare, transport, free meals and equipment and learning materials. The total available budget for 23/24 was over £7 million; a breakdown of the categories of support, amount spent and number of learners supported can be found in Annex C.

Some examples of projects that Medr funds to improve access to post 16 education

1. Medr's Wales-wide higher education, further education and schools, regional, collaborative, [Reaching Wider Programme](#) aims to increase higher education participation from priority groups in Wales by raising educational aspirations and skills, and creating innovative study opportunities and learning pathways to higher education⁷. Medr allocates £2m annually to the Reaching Wider Programme, with an additional £500k for a Reaching Wider National Mentoring Programme.
2. The Medr-funded [myf.cymru](#) programme is a Welsh language mental health and wellbeing project and website for students. The resources have been created in partnership with Bangor University, Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Grŵp Llandrillo Menai to support learners to prepare for university, with a focus on resources and services available through the medium of Welsh.
3. Medr, jointly with the Office for Students supports [Student Space](#). Student Space provides [advice and information](#) for students in higher education, including on mental health and well-being, studying in higher education, life as a Black student, life as a disabled student, student stories and signposts to support at individual universities. Information is available in English and Welsh [Ynglŷn â Student Space](#).

⁵ See Medr fee and access plan guidance - [W24/07HE: 2025/26 and 2026/27 Fee and Access Plan application guidance](#)

⁶ [Medr/2024/07 Wellbeing and health funding 2024/25 and monitoring requirements](#)

⁷ Reaching Wider Programme priority groups include young people and adults from the bottom two quintiles of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, post-16 young people in level 4 learning, in addition to adults without level 4 qualifications; learners with disabilities; learners from ethnic minority backgrounds; and Welsh medium learners, including supporting second language learning and Welsh cultures, care experienced learners and learners who are carers.

Post-16 destination data

Medr is committed to making data-informed decisions, and our draft strategic plan outlines our intention to make foundational improvements on how we establish baselines from which to base our planning. We intend to review and improve how we collect data from providers, and to develop systems that will allow us to better interrogate the data we do have.

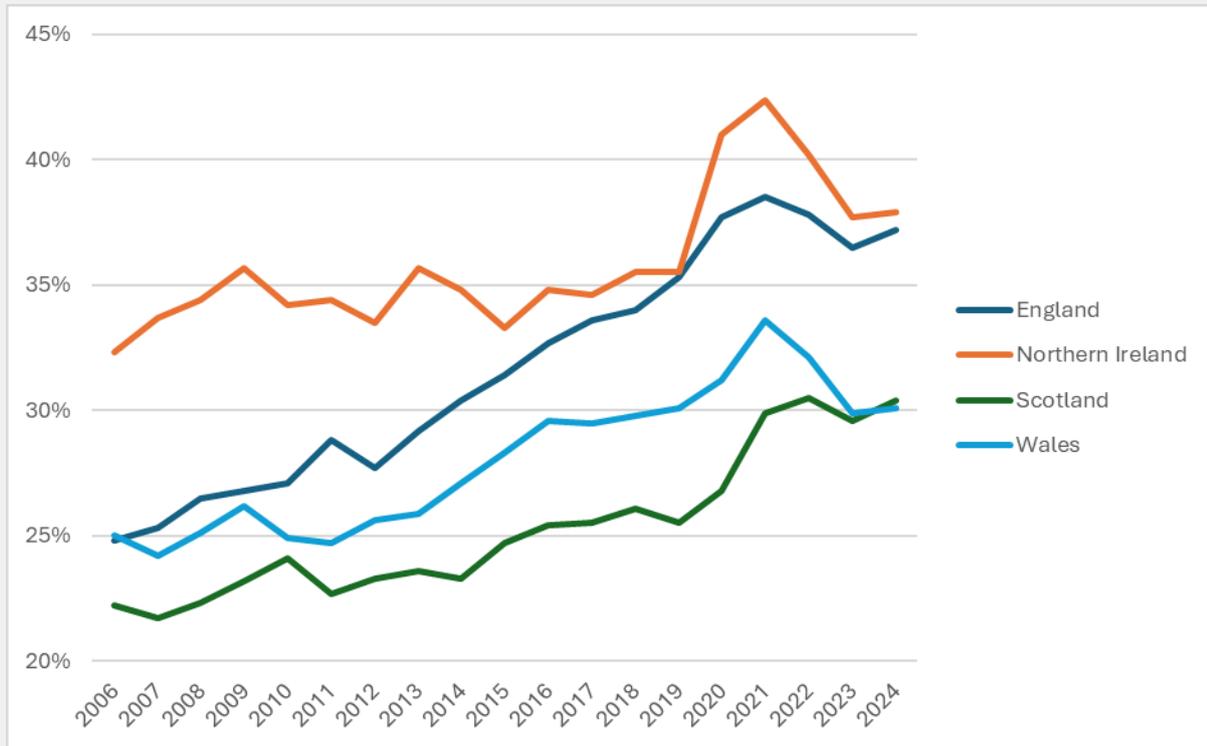
It is important to make a distinction between the collection and the analysis of data. In terms of publicly-funded provision, various data sources collected by the Welsh Government and other organisations such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency/Jisc provide rich information about learners in post-16 education and the type of provision being delivered.

Further analysis of these data, to better understand the pathways and progression of learners through the education system, is critical. On 25th February, Medr will publish a statistical analysis of progression from Year 11 to different types of tertiary education, including breakdowns by learner characteristics. Moving forward, we want to ensure that we use our data as effectively as possible, making meaningful comparisons of data across the sector and understanding the contributions of each part of the tertiary education system to our strategic aims.

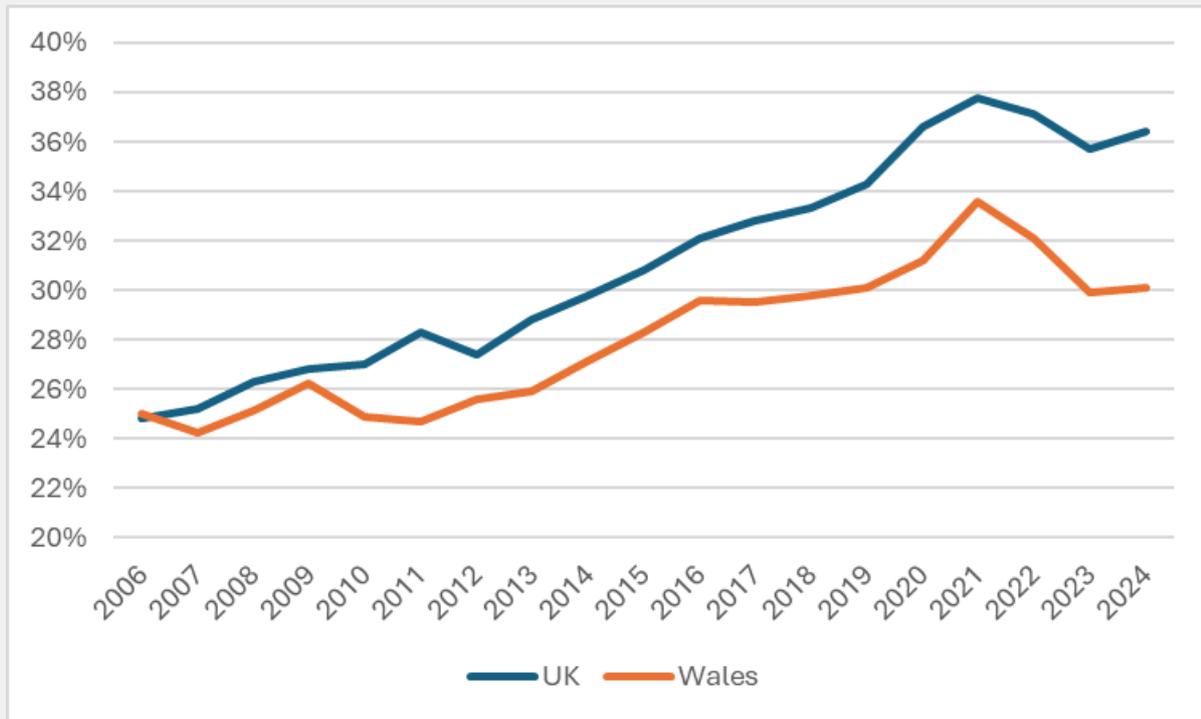
There are gaps in the data available on learners once they no longer engage with the education system. Our understanding of the national level picture is hampered by the increasing volatility in Welsh NEET estimates, particularly for the 16 to 18 cohort. It is therefore important to note that although the government-funded provision in tertiary education is rich with data, and there are opportunities to better understand and utilise that information, the tertiary education system is one part of a wider system for which important contextual information is not always available or timely.

ANNEX A

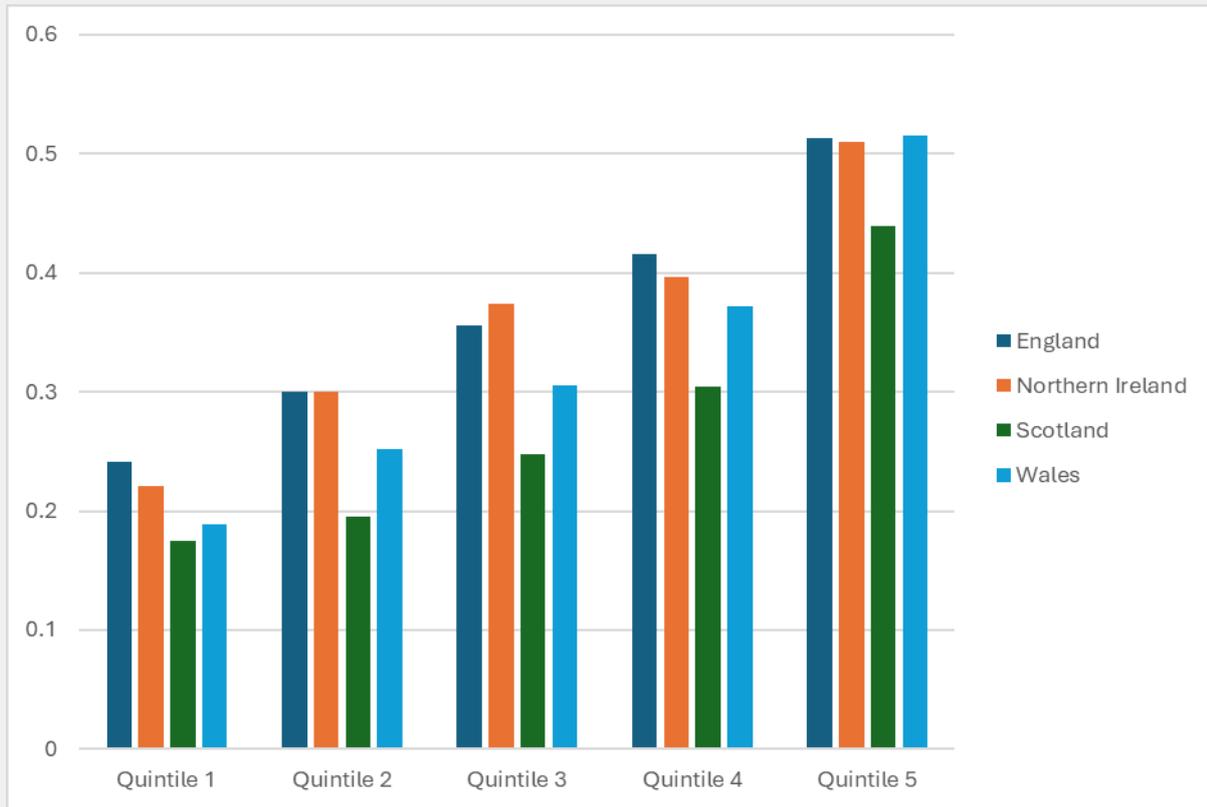
Graph 1: Participation rate for 18 year olds by country of domicile 2006 – 2024, UCAS End of Cycle 2024



Graph 2: UK and Wales entry rate, proportion of 18 year old population who were accepted, by cycle year



Graph 3: Participation rate for 18 year olds by POLAR4 quintile and country of domicile 2024, UCAS End of Cycle 2024



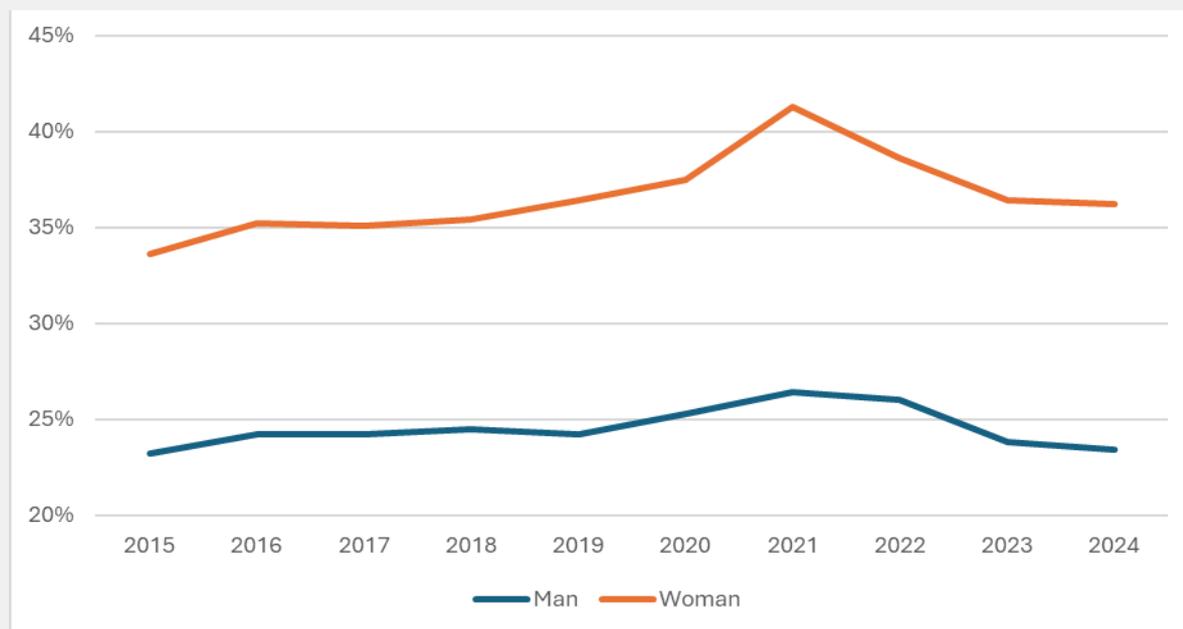
The POLAR4 measure aims to classify areas based on how likely young people are to participate in higher education. While it is a UK-wide measure, it is becoming out of date as it is based on data on students who began their studies between 2009-10 and 2013-14.

Differences in entry rates by sex (UCAS End of Cycle report data)

Table 1: Entry rates: Proportion of the 18 year old Welsh-domiciled population who were accepted, by gender and cycle year

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Man	23.2%	24.2%	24.2%	24.5%	24.2%	25.3%	26.4%	26.0%	23.8%	23.4%
Woman	33.6%	35.2%	35.1%	35.4%	36.4%	37.5%	41.3%	38.6%	36.4%	36.2%

Graph 4: Entry rates: Proportion of the 18 year old Welsh-domiciled population who were accepted, by gender and cycle year



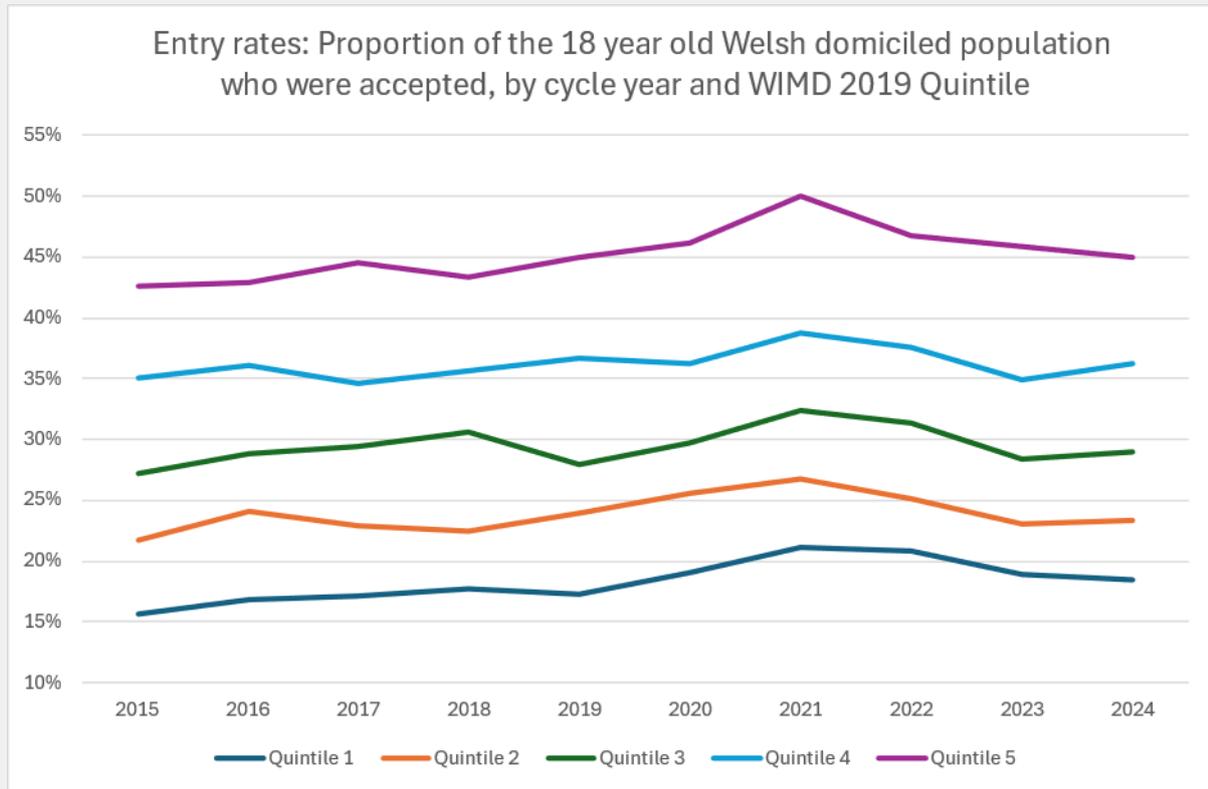
In 2024, Wales had a 12.8 percentage point difference between the entry rates of 18 year old men and women into HE – this is wider than the 10.9 percentage gap for the whole of the UK.

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and regional disparities in entry rates (UCAS End of Cycle report data)

Table 2: Entry rates: Proportion of the 18 year old Welsh domiciled population who were accepted, by cycle year and WIMD quintile

WIMD Quintile	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1 – most deprived	15.7%	16.8%	17.1%	17.7%	17.3%	19.1%	21.1%	20.9%	18.9%	18.5%
2	21.7%	24.1%	22.9%	22.5%	23.9%	25.5%	26.7%	25.2%	23.1%	23.3%
3	27.2%	28.8%	29.4%	30.6%	28.0%	29.7%	32.4%	31.3%	28.4%	29.0%
4	35.1%	36.1%	34.6%	35.6%	36.7%	36.2%	38.7%	37.6%	34.9%	36.3%
5 – least deprived	42.6%	42.9%	44.5%	43.4%	45.0%	46.2%	50.0%	46.8%	45.8%	44.9%

Graph 5: Entry rates: Proportion of the 18 year old Welsh domiciled population who were accepted, by cycle year and WIMD 2019 quintile



To note, different parts of the UK use different methodologies to establish their respective index of multiple deprivation.

Table 3: Percentage of Welsh-domiciled 18 year old enrolments to institutions in Wales as opposed to in the rest of the UK.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Wales	55.1%	55.1%	53.9%	53.3%	53.4%	50.3%	50.7%
Rest of UK	44.9%	44.9%	46.1%	46.7%	46.6%	49.7%	49.3%

ANNEX B

Suggested causes and impacts of inequity in the tertiary education system

1. There is evidence of differential progression to and through post 16 education by learners and students. The Wales Centre Public Policy (WCPP) research [ADR-Wales-Data-Report-Understanding-inequity-in-tertiary-education.pdf](#)⁸ (October 2024) report sets out the population characteristics and the differential rates of progression to Sixth Form, FE and HE. The report concludes: *‘Overall, the analysis suggests that inequities are apparent in terms of progression, with learners with SEN status, disability, deprivation, lower socio-economic backgrounds, lower occupational backgrounds, and lower education backgrounds facing barriers to continued engagement in education post schooling.’* and *‘There were also common patterns of pathways, delineated by these same characteristics, with more affluent households more likely to progress through the entire tertiary education system.’*⁹ The WCPP report suggested that these limiting socio-economic, cultural and organisational factors are likely to have impacted progression to post-16 education at Key Stage 4 and earlier *‘creating the first barrier to continuing in education’*¹⁰.

Prior attainment and education aspirations

2. The Welsh Government report [Analysis of factors that influence post-16 learning achievement in Wales](#) (2022) confirms that absence in year 11 and prior attainment at Key Stage 4 are strong drivers of subsequent achievement at post 16 education as well as other characteristics including *‘eligibility for Free School Meals, local area deprivation, gender, and compulsory education starting age also seem to play a role in explaining post-16 achievement’*¹¹.
3. The [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer?](#) report indicates that, for young carers, findings suggest that a combination of caring responsibilities and the level of deprivation in a particular area for school-aged carers may impact participation in school. The report shows a significantly reduced level of participation in tertiary education for young carers compared to their peers, irrespective of levels of deprivation. These factors potentially affect future economic prospects¹² and *‘There are approximately 8,200 young carers in Wales, who are more likely than others of their age to live in deprived areas and experience disruption to their education’*¹³.
4. The Equality and Human Rights Commission [Education Fact Sheet - Wales](#) reports research by the CASCADE research centre, which *‘found that 13–14-year-olds with experience in care had expectations of attending university that were significantly lower than those of their peers. The same children were also less likely to be in higher education aged 20.’*

⁸ [ADR-Wales-Data-Report-Understanding-inequity-in-tertiary-education.pdf](#) The research is based on learner cohorts’ journeys through the tertiary education system in Wales between 2011/12 and 2018/19.

⁹ [ADR-Wales-Data-Report-Understanding-inequity-in-tertiary-education.pdf](#) p61

¹⁰ [ADR-Wales-Data-Report-Understanding-inequity-in-tertiary-education.pdf](#) p61

¹¹ [Analysis of factors that influence post-16 learning achievement in Wales](#) P7

¹² [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer](#) p74.

¹³ [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer](#) p54

Socio-economic disadvantage

5. [A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome](#) (2021) confirms child poverty, including food poverty and poor quality accommodation, together with higher rates of adverse childhood experiences in vulnerable to socio-economic deprivation, have lifelong impacts: 'Those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are more likely to have worse outcomes in the areas of education, work, living standards, health, justice, and participation in public life. These areas all affect one another and problems in one often lead to a 'knock-on' effect on other areas¹⁴. The report confirms the intersectionality between socio-economic disadvantage and other protected characteristics compounds disadvantage¹⁵.
6. Similarly, [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer?](#) Report stated that: '*In 2020/21, just over half (52.5%) of children eligible for Free School Meals in Wales achieved 5 GCSEs grade A* to C, compared with 79.8% children not eligible for Free School Meals¹⁶.*' It further noted that '*Free School Meals as a measure for deprivation excludes many children in Wales living below the poverty line but above the Free School Meal threshold (of household earnings being less than £7,400¹⁷)*'.

Gender

7. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) education fact sheet [Education Fact Sheet - Wales](#) identified emerging evidence that: '*male students are spread across a broader range of apprenticeships than their female counterparts. The majority, 58.6%, of female apprentices were undertaking healthcare and public services learning in 2021/22, an increase from 51.7% of all female apprentices in 2017/18.*' And '*In 2021/22, 95% of construction, 94.1% of engineering and 87.8% of manufacturing apprentices were male. In comparison, 87.9% of hair and beauty apprentices, 82.6% of health and public services, 62.7% of management and 67.7% of business administration students were female.*'

Ethnicity

8. The Careers Wales [Year 11 Pupil Destinations from Schools in Wales](#) (2023) survey (of 33,110 individuals) confirmed that 92.6% of learners from minority ethnic groups continued in full-time post 16 education in a school or FE college. A higher proportion of young people not in education, employment or training came from white backgrounds (2.1% or 642 individuals) compared to individuals from an ethnic minority (0.9% or 23 individuals).
9. The same survey may provide some evidence that the current system is not providing post 16 options attractive to learners from some white backgrounds, as they are much more like to go into the various labour market categories (9.6%) compared to those from minority ethnic backgrounds (3.6%)

¹⁴ [A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome](#) p55

¹⁵ This literature review also took account of the Welsh Government's [A review of evidence on socio-economic disadvantage and inequalities of outcome](#)

¹⁶ [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer](#) p22

¹⁷ [Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023: Is Wales Fairer](#) p34, citing [Reay, 2022](#) (2022), 'Measuring and understanding contemporary English educational inequalities', IFS Deaton Review of Inequalities,

10. The Welsh Government's [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan: 2024 update](#) notes that learners from Black ethnic backgrounds continue to achieve lower A level outcomes than other ethnic groups, although they achieve better outcomes than their peers with similar GCSE results. The report acknowledges that while differences remain in post-16 achievement for different ethnic groups, are starting to narrow.
11. A [report](#) (2022) by the Higher Education Policy Institute, found that Gypsy, Roma and Travellers communities were *'the lowest achieving ethnic groupings in the UK education system, with stark disparities in attainment apparent from early years Foundation stage onwards'*¹⁸. Analysis of Census 2021 data shows that People who identified as "White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller" were the most likely to hold no qualifications out of all ethnic groups (58.8%), followed by "White: Roma" (31.8%) and "Asian, Asian Welsh or Asian British: Bangladeshi" (30.9%).¹⁹
12. Within higher education in Wales, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students are under-represented. The proportion of higher education learners from a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller background in 2022/23 is less than a quarter of the proportion of the general population (as recorded at the 2021 census) from the same ethnic grouping across England and Wales. This picture is consistent across other UK nations. In 2021, Gypsy, Roma and Traveller young people were [least likely to enter higher education](#) by the age of 19; 6.3% of Gypsies and Roma, and 3.8% of Travellers had entered higher education, compared to 40% of young people.

Cost of living

13. The [Learner experiences in post-16 education \(2024\)](#) report, evidenced by a learner voice survey, confirms that financial issues were a common feedback theme, including costs of education, living and transport. Reported impacts of financial worries include *'disruption to education, inability to eat sufficient healthy and nutritious food, inability to meet transport costs and concerns about higher education funding'*²⁰, with learners saying: *'Worries about financing higher education so changing plans for the future especially because of a lack of money (cost of living)'. And "The cost of transport is a barrier to me having free choice to attend the college I wanted to go to"*²¹.

The Impact of Covid-19

14. We remain unclear as yet of ongoing and longer-term Covid-19 pandemic impacts on learners in compulsory and post-compulsory education, though there is evidence that some groups are more adversely affected than others.
15. The [Learner experiences in post-16 education \(2024\)](#) survey found almost half of respondents (47.5%) in year 11 in 2020, reported a negative pandemic impact on job

¹⁸ the Higher Education Policy Institute [report](#) (2022) p9

¹⁹ Ethnic [group](#) differences in health, housing, education and economic status in Wales (Census 2021)

²⁰ [Learner experiences in post-16 education \(2024\)](#). p56

²¹ The [Learner experiences in post-16 education \(2024\)](#) report. p54.

prospects, compared to 36% who were in year 8 at the time²². The report concludes: *'Impacts of the pandemic remain prevalent amongst learners currently in FE. Over a third of respondents indicated that their education plans changed due to the pandemic. This was particularly evident for care-experienced learners, those with disabilities or additional learning needs, and learners eligible for FSM.*

16. A decrease in poor mental health post-pandemic was among most cited reason for planned learning course changes. More than half (52.9%) of survey respondents agreed that their learning disruption was due to mental ill health, including stress and anxiety. Feelings of “imposter syndrome” amongst learners in receipt of centre-assessed grades, rather than through formal examinations, was also not uncommon, together with concerns regarding their ‘readiness’ when entering post-16 education during and after the pandemic. The report concludes that: ‘the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and had a profound impact on learners’ educational experiences and mental health.’²³
17. In higher education. A report by the [Centre for Mental Health](#)²⁴ evaluating the impact of the higher education [Student Space](#) programme²⁵ found some student groups experienced greater challenges as a result of the pandemic, including: students from racialised communities; students with disabilities; international students; and students from ‘widening participation/ access’ groups. These groups broadly align with those identified in the WCPP report on *Understanding Inequality in Tertiary Education* cited earlier.
18. The British Academy published [The COVID Decade: understanding the long-term societal impacts of COVID-19](#). One of the report’s conclusions was: *‘The pandemic and various measures taken to address it have resulted in differential mental health outcomes. Access to support for new cases and for those with pre-existing conditions has also been disrupted, in addition to services for children and young people. Both have the potential to result in long-term mental health impacts for particular groups if there is not a renewed focus on the causes and solutions for sustaining mental health across society, including by tackling the structural and root causes of inequality.’* and:

‘The consequences of lost access to education at all levels, coupled with changes to assessments, will be felt for years to come, and wholly recovering lost education is unfeasible. This has exacerbated existing socioeconomic inequalities in attainment and highlighted digital inequality. Because a high-skill economy will be essential for future prosperity and for society to thrive, it will be vital to consider whether lifelong educational opportunities are sufficiently comprehensive, diverse and flexible.’

²² [Learner experiences in post-16 education \(2024\)](#) A total of 1,821 usable responses were received with responses. The highest proportions of respondents were from South Wales postcode districts. There were no respondents from the Gwynedd area or from some South-East Wales postcode districts.

²³ [Learner experiences in post-16 education \(2024\)](#) p56.

²⁴ [Centre for Mental Health](#)

²⁵ [Student Space](#) programme provided web-based intervention supporting student mental well-being over the pandemic

ANNEX C

Financial Contingency Fund

Total FCF Budget available for 23/24:	£7,018,878.00
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Categories of Support	Amount spent (£)	Number of learners supported
Assistance with Disability costs	110.00	2
Books	16,429.96	444
Equipment	666,404.20	4,431
Accommodation	87,962.07	127
Childcare	1,045,466.43	639
Transport (including bulk purchase)	2,727,907.34	9,708
Disabled Transport	131,082.76	57
Stationery	10,832.45	138
Exam Fees	7,647.70	107
Registration Fees	7,228.50	95
Trips	76,726.35	472
Lunch Vouchers	1,420,710.39	9,725
Disclosure Barring Checks	13,470.90	342
Other	252,783.68	1,465

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Agenda Item 4

By virtue of paragraph(s) vi of Standing Order 17.42

Document is Restricted

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

RET 17

Ymateb gan: Gyrfa Cymru

Response from: Careers Wales

Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options (vocational and academic routes post 16, i.e. further education, sixth form, apprenticeships and training, and onward to higher education)

Quality and nature of information provided to learners within schools and those educated other than at school (EOTAS).

Careers Wales is the national careers service for Wales and is remitted to deliver the statutory duty on behalf of the Welsh Government in providing impartial careers guidance to young people aged 14 – 19. We offer every young person a careers guidance interview before they leave compulsory education. We have a Partnership Agreement in place with all secondary schools, special schools and PRUs that outline the support that will be provided to the school for the academic year.

Careers Wales is only one part of the landscape of providing information to learners within schools and EOTAS provision. Dr Hefin David MS's 'Transitions to Employment report recommends 'Learners should be provided with authentic and meaningful experiences of the world of work supported by the new Curriculum for Wales provision for Careers and Work-Related Experiences from 3-16. Welsh Government should ensure that further education institutions, employers and other relevant stakeholders have appropriate access to learners throughout their school career, particularly at age 11-16.' This is only possible if all partners work in collaboration for the good of learners.

Careers Wales welcomed the 14–16 learning guidance that outlines learner entitlement during Year 10 and 11. It also welcomed the focus on CWRE and the provision that all learners receive a course of careers education and access to information from Careers Wales. We are particularly interested to understand how this will be monitored across Wales to ensure consistency of quality for learners.



Quality and nature of information provided directly to learners by Careers Wales.

Careers Wales provides a national careers information, advice and guidance service for the people of Wales, supporting young people and adults to make successful transitions into education, employment and training (EET). At the forefront of our delivery are our professionally trained careers advisers. Careers Wales' professional standards for advisers require them to achieve QCF Level 6 in Career Guidance and Development or the equivalent and register with the Career Development Institute's (CDI) UK Register of Career Development Professionals. They provide impartial and professional support to individuals and co-ordinate the range of services of the Careers Wales team for individual schools.

We offer all pupils a guidance interview before leaving school, with ongoing support which will be tailored to meet their individual need. We provide four levels of support:

1. **Universal support** - offer of a guidance interview and additional support based on the careers advisers professional judgement
2. **Career Check support** - one to one support for those young people identified from Career Check as in need of guidance and coaching support
3. **Targeted support** for young people whose individual characteristics can lead to them not being in education, employment or training post compulsory education
4. **Additional Learning Needs support** - one to one support for those young people identified as having additional learning needs (ALN).

Careers Wales has rigorous evaluation and continuous improvement processes in place to ensure the quality of service provided to customers.

Every customer is sent a 'Customer Satisfaction Survey' following their first guidance interview with a careers adviser. The results of this survey have been consistently positive over many years. Results include:

98% of customers were satisfied with the service they received from Careers Wales

94% would recommend the Careers Wales to family/friends

97% agreed the adviser helped them understand their options

96% agreed the adviser gave them the help they needed

A key component of Careers Wales's Continuous Improvement Framework is direct observation of work with customers/stakeholders. Observation helps us understand the standard of service



being delivered to customers/stakeholders, and how the skills of employees are used to support and enable customers/stakeholders to achieve appropriate outcomes.

Careers Wales is subject to ESTYN inspections. In the most recent thematic inspection, ESTYN stated:

‘We found most of the young people eligible for a guidance session at the schools and settings we visited make good progress from their differing starting points when creating their plans for the future. They discuss their ideas and respond well to questions and challenges posed when a plan may seem risky. Where young people begin their guidance session with unrealistic plans and ideas, this usually stems from a lack of support from their school or setting. Following guidance, these young people make very good progress towards understanding the post-16 routes available to them.’

The extent to which further education colleges are able to engage directly with learners in schools.

The picture across Wales is varied, we surveyed our careers advisers across Wales and 86% agreed that FE colleges do engage directly with schools.

There appears to be a more productive/creative relationships between schools and FE colleges when schools do not have a sixth form. It would appear the careers adviser is the only consistent channel through which young people and parents hear about all post-16 options in available.

Links between colleges and schools appear consistently strong in relation to ALN learners and transition planning. All ALN careers advisers commented on excellent liaison between FE and schools – attending reviews, arranging taster courses and campus visits.

Some examples of how colleges engage with schools include:

- The Learner Services team liaise with the careers coordinator and offer to undertake group sessions to help with college applications.
- Designated school liaison staff contact schools to offer support and have a presence at school open events. They also help with learners who are looking at college as an intended destination or those who are making a managed transition to FE e.g education other than at school (EOTAS)
- Colleges visit schools to support with application forms.
- Apprenticeship departments visit schools to make presentations.
- Schools and colleges work together on a list of pupils who should have submitted a college application. The list is monitored to ensure that applications are in place. One

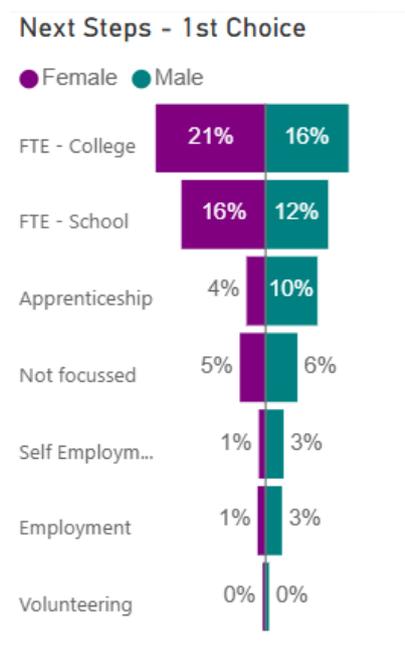


area in Gwynedd is a tertiary area where there is notably good collaboration between the college and the schools.

The extent to which learners in schools are made aware of the options available to them in school sixth forms and local further education colleges, and how closely schools engage with local colleges. Are there any conflicts of interest between sixth forms and further education colleges and is this more prevalent in some areas of Wales more than others?

Careers Wales plays a pivotal role in raising young people's awareness of all the options available to them. We undertake a large survey of year 10 pupils across Wales, this survey (Career Check) is on average completed by over 28,000 learners.

Young people are asked about their intended destinations, 1st and 2nd choice. The image below shows the 1st intended destination of the current year 11:



This broadly aligns with the actual destination trends, with the exception of apprenticeships, where it is consistently a first choice for 13.5 % of the cohort and second choice for 21% of the cohort. However, when we compare this with the destination survey there is a difference in take up with only 1.6% of young people leaving Year 11, who left school in 2024 entering work-based training (WBT) with employed status.



In our internal survey with our careers advisers, 45% said that there can be conflicts of interest between schools with sixth forms and FE colleges.

Examples highlighted included:

- Lack of transparency in sharing marketing materials
- Not inviting FE representative to attend school open days
- Challenging careers advisers around sharing information on FE offer

The extent to which employers are able to engage directly with learners in schools, for example at careers events.

Careers Wales has well established links with local and national employers to support its approach to employer engagement. We have a national team of Business Engagements Advisers, experienced in working with employers and expert in their knowledge of national and regional labour market trends.

Service Offer

- Visits to employer premises
- Employer talks in schools
- Digital employer presentations and virtual CWRE activities
- World of work days/carousel events
- Speed networking sessions
- The development of employer challenges and specific curriculum related content
- Support to develop alumni networks and strategic links with employers

Big Ideas Wales

During 2024/25, Careers Wales will again have responsibility for the organisation and management of entrepreneur role model workshops as part of Welsh Government's Big Ideas Wales programme. Details of programme delivery will be discussed with individual schools.

The engagement of employers is essential to:

- Help pupils understand how the subjects they study at school are relevant to the world of work
- Provide pupils with access to employer experiences which help them to plan their career journey
- Provide information about local, regional and national trends in the labour market
- Help raise pupils' aspirations about their future career goals.
- Challenge career limiting beliefs relating to gender, race and background



During the 23-24 business year Careers Wales delivered 1,589 employer engagement activities with schools, the offer is available to all settings.

Between 1st April 2024 and 30th November 2024:

- 203 mainstream secondary schools have participated in at least one employer event
- 169 have participated in 3 or more events
- 46 special schools and PRUs have participated in at least one event
- 20 have participated in 3 or more

Careers Wales has a robust evaluation plan in place for these events, with results being consistently positive:

- 85% of learners survey were positive about the event they attended
- 97% told us that they felt better informed as a result of attending
- 83% were more confident to plan for their future as a result of attending
- 84% felt more motivated to plan for their future as a result of attending

Who else influences learners future career choices (e.g. parents, teachers, peers), and how well are those people supported to do this.

According to the recent national conversation report there are multiple sources which led young people to choose their next step. External advice from teachers is the highest source (40%) followed by advice from parents/carers (30%) and careers advisers (24%).

Careers Wales provides multiple options for capacity building of teachers as the top influencers.

Careers Wales Quality Award (CWQA)

Careers Wales are currently piloting the CWQA with 49 schools and setting across Wales. It has been designed to align with the Curriculum for Wales for 3-16 year olds and aims to support schools to create high quality careers and work-related experiences (CWRE).

Each school has ongoing support from a Careers Wales CWRE Curriculum Coordinator who provides bespoke consultancy and training. Careers Wales also provides a moderation role in assessing all criteria submitted for the CWQA.

The CWQA has 3 stages, each with a different focus;



- Stage 1 – Leadership
This stage is about formulating and maintaining the commitment to lead the development of CWRE.
- Stage 2 – Development
This stage is about realising CWRE in the curriculum through professional learning, stakeholder engagement and effective teaching and learning.
- Stage 3 – Impact
This stage is about demonstrating impact in CWRE.

39 schools are currently working towards stage two, and a further 10 schools of the new cohort are working towards Stage one.

Careers Wales also deliver consultancy to schools outside of those undertaking the CWQA. Our offer to non CWQA schools has been reduced to an upon request basis offer and our generic offer to primary schools is restricted to referral to online resources.

The Careers Development Award

The former Careers Wales Mark has been rebranded as **'The Careers Development Award'** for use in FEIs. This will continue to be promoted until a potential review in line with Medr developments.

The Curriculum for Wales statutory guidance highlights that schools and settings should ensure their staff engage in appropriate and relevant professional learning opportunities to help CWRE become effectively integrated in their curriculum. Practitioners are also encouraged to undertake training opportunities offered by employers and other organisations, to help them learn about the latest developments in the world of work. In order to support schools and settings with this, Careers Wales offers a range of professional learning opportunities for careers leaders and other school staff.

Accredited Level 6 qualification

Careers Wales annually delivers an accredited Level 6 qualification in careers leadership to support practitioners embed careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) across their curriculum. Delivered by Careers Wales, and endorsed by the National Academy for Educational Leadership Wales, the qualification supports schools as learning organisations and the professional standards for teaching and leadership.

Parents

Careers Wales has set out an ambitious vision in our [Brighter Futures](#) strategy which acknowledges the requirement to engage and support parents. We recognise that, for many young people, parents are key influencers who have an important role to play in shaping and



guiding decisions. Research shows time and again that parents are one of the biggest sources of influence and the biggest source of careers advice for young people

Ensuring that parents are knowledgeable and suitably prepared to support their child in their career planning will help young people make more informed decisions.

Careers Wales also has a comprehensive parent strategy which includes attendance at parents' events, one-to-one interactions with parents and a termly newsletters which includes information on options, LMI, campaigns and our website. In the 2024-25 business year, to-date careers advisers in schools have achieved the following in terms of our parent work:

- Attendance at 216 parent events (e.g online events aimed at EHE parents, parent evenings in schools, options events in schools, open evenings and other community-based events such as stakeholder services events and the Eisteddfod)
- Recorded 13,966 interactions with parents/guardians (parent evenings, careers guidance follow-ups with parents, e-mail and text responses to queries from parents)
- Involvement in 5,021 other parent activities (advocacy, liaison, attendance at reviews)

Our website parent pages are available to provide information aimed at enabling parents to best support their children with all aspects of career planning and decision making. There are generic pages which provide an overview of our services and how they can help their children as well as more targeted information aimed at specific groups such as those Electively Home Educated, ALN etc. We also provide information on specific topics such as year 9/ post-16 options, work experience, the opportunity structure and how to prepare for a careers guidance interview.

The pages most visited are:

- Information for parents of children in KS4 (35%)
- Exploring career ideas with your child (33%)
- Information for parents of children in KS3 (24%)
- Work experience (18%)
- Information for parents of children in college and 6th form (16%)

How effective careers support is at compulsory school age?

To what extent careers support at pre-16 is resulting in positive or negative outcomes post-16 e.g. young people finding themselves not in education, employment or training (NEET).



Careers support can take a variety of forms which include:

- Careers guidance interviews
- Follow up interviews / digital contacts
- Group sessions
- Practical support e.g. with applications
- Advocacy support
- Meetings with parents
- Business engagement activities

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Within our strategic vision [Brighter Futures](#), Careers Wales has two KPIs for young people linked specifically to careers guidance interviews.

The first relates to young people in year 11 in mainstream schools:

95% of young people in year 11 who receive a guidance interview will enter a positive destination.

Since the start of Brighter Futures, we have consistently exceeded this target.

The second relates to young people who fall within our priority groups. Our KPI for the targeted group is for 85% who have had guidance to enter a positive destination.

We identified specific groups of young people that may require additional support to make a successful transition from school. Our priority groups include young people who have Additional Learning Needs at School Action Plus/IDP level, young carers, care experienced young people, young people on free school meals, young people who are Educated Other than at School (EOTAS) and young people who are poor attenders.

We have consistently exceeded this figure with over 90% of this group entering a positive destination each year.

Home Educated

Careers Wales also has advisers who support young people who are home educated. This is a group that is increasing in number. Data analysis indicates that home educated students who had one-to-one interactions with a careers adviser were more likely to achieve positive outcomes. Specifically, 82% of those who engaged in a careers guidance interview successfully transitioned into positive destinations. In contrast, only 54% of young people, who did not receive a careers guidance interview were confirmed as having achieved a positive destination.

Pupil Wellbeing

School staff and careers advisers are finding that higher numbers of young people are experiencing anxiety and mental health issues. Our destination data for the last 3 years



demonstrates that of the people who were NEET at the end of year 11 the majority (over 65%) each year were unable or not ready to enter EET at the point of the destinations snapshot (31/10).

A study evidences that careers guidance can impact positively on wellbeing for adults. Careers Wales is currently involved with an international study of the impact of careers guidance on the wellbeing of young people. Initial indications are similar to the results of the adult study, the report will be published during 2025.

Careers Wales recently undertook an internal review of the work with targeted learners with Chris Percy, (Independent Strategy & Policy consultant / Data Scientist) the headlines from this include:

- Students make significant progress in our four Distance Travelled questions over year 11, improving on average one step on one question, e.g. from disagree to agree that they feel confident about what they need to do (2021/22 data, n=882).
- Having more one-on-one time with careers advisers appears to be a major driver of this progress, using appropriate statistical analysis to account for how support is personalised such that students in more need get more help.
- Analysis of post-16 NEET outcomes also suggests a positive relationship with extra one-on-one support, but the sample sizes are too low to be precise about this evidence yet (since only 3.2% of the targeted support sample with CAT data were NEET in 2021/22, n=6230).
- We're continuing to evaluate this programme as more years of data become available for analysis and programme implementation is refined over time, enabling us to build confidence in these assessments.

Due to sample size Careers Wales were not in a position to share this work wider.

Whether work experience opportunities for learners of compulsory school are operational, effective and meaningful and any barriers in that regard.

Generally, there is an inconsistent offer to learners across Wales. There are some schools and some local authorities that offer work experience to some learners, but they are few in number and the offer is patchy.

Careers Wales have delivered a tailored work experience (TWE) programme on behalf of the Welsh Government for the last 3 years and placed 878 learners during this time. For the 2023/24 academic year:



- 380 learners completed a work placement.
- 85.6% of these young people went on to a positive destination at the end of the programme
- 185 started a college course, 4 returned to 6th form and 25 young people went on to start an apprenticeship.

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?

Between August 2022 and 1st of February 2023: 1,100 Welsh students dropped out of HE. Wales also has the highest level of drop out from Foundation Degree courses.

Those Welsh students dropping out of university will still be liable for the full tuition costs of that year and the Welsh Government do not recoup any of the grant money that they pay out. It could be argued that access to impartial guidance before making such expensive decisions would benefit both the individual and the state.

Two out of five 2nd year students in UK universities, polled by UCAS, would have made different choices if they had received better careers advice.

Very worryingly, Wales currently has the lowest application rate for HE in the UK. Second only to the NE of England.

It could be argued that the drop in applications links to other opportunities rising in popularity e.g. Degree Apprenticeships but the statistics do not support this presumption. Worryingly, the drop in HE applications can mostly be seen amongst those young people from deprived areas of Wales. Universities Wales wrote in August 2024 that “The future of the Welsh economy depends upon the nation being sufficiently equipped to capitalise on industrial, digital and societal developments, with increasing demand for graduate level skills. If Welsh people are not gaining these skills Wales’ economy will find itself at an economic disadvantage compared to the rest of the UK.”

Despite the Welsh Government offering the most generous maintenance packages in the UK, it still leaves Welsh students £6,482 short of the £18,600 required for a reasonable standard of living. Our FE / sixth form leavers need impartial guidance to make the very best-informed career-related decisions.



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.

This information is not routinely collated by Careers Wales, but some careers advisers report that young people in some areas may make decision based on the availability or lack of availability of options in their language of choice. In some areas, there is a lack of opportunity to study specific academic subjects though the medium of Welsh (e.g STEM A-levels), but advisers note that young people would prefer to study these in English in a Welsh medium setting (e.g Welsh/ Bilingual School) rather than and non-Welsh medium setting. The lack of HE opportunities available in these subjects through the medium of Welsh can also influence on their decisions.

Research by the Welsh language commissioner in November 2023:

According to recent research, for Welsh speakers who intend to continue studying in Wales, the opportunity to study in Welsh or bilingually will be an important factor in choosing their next place of study.

Learners' main reasons for not choosing to study subjects through the medium of Welsh were: the perception that their English language skills were stronger and that studying through the medium of English was easier for them; that a subject (or subjects) were not available in Welsh; that their further studies were likely to be in English or that there were better study prospects in English, in their opinion.

When comparing school and college learners with each other, however, there is a big difference between the percentage of subjects that school learners studied through the medium of Welsh (72%) and the percentage that college learners studied through the medium of Welsh (4%).

Equity of access

Are some groups of learners disadvantaged by the current system (e.g. pupils from low-income households, learners with travel needs)?

The Wales Centre of Public Policy report on 'Understanding inequity in tertiary education', highlights the challenges facing young people from more socio-economically deprived backgrounds and states that they are less likely to progress to tertiary education. For example,



young people in receipt of free school meals are a third more likely to become NEET than their peers. The report highlights inequalities based on gender, disability, ethnicity, and country of origin.

Medr will have a key role in tackling the inequalities at post 16 level, with the support of organisations such as Careers Wales, pre-16 educators and stakeholders in making sure that all learners have a fair chance of success.

There are many reports available which site some of the disadvantages young people face with the current systems, these include:

Young Person's Guarantee generation Z series: annual report 2023 | GOV.WALES

- The other main barrier reported was that 21% of young people had never done any work experience.
- Other issues included transport availability and costs, with 79% of respondents sighting it as a making it harder for them to access the job, education or training they want, either sometimes or all the time.
- Young people's experiences with transport tended to be negative. Unreliability emerged as a significant concern, with frequent mentions of services being full, late, out of service, or cancelled without sufficient notice. The cost of public transport, even when discounted through passes, continued to be a point of contention for respondents.
- Transportation emerged as a significant barrier for disabled young people in Wales when accessing jobs, education or training opportunities. 34% of disabled young respondents consistently faced challenges due to transport issues, while half encountered these difficulties occasionally. Disabled respondents were significantly more likely to report dissatisfaction with their work experience in several aspects.
- Practices seen by Careers Wales are increasing difficulty to access post 16 provision as there appears to be differing systems being applied in each local authority. This can restrict the options open to a young person. One local authority may agree to provide transport to a college within their LA area but not outside their area even if the college in another local authority is nearer to the young person's home.

Work experience

- Young people who experienced paid employment or work experience while at school more often gained employment post-school. Receiving support from a vocational education programme or occupational course, or support from a transitional employment programme led to higher rates of employment.
[opportunities_and_barriers_of_diff_employment_models_2020.pdf](#)



- The findings in [Princes Trust Youth Index 2024.pdf](#) show a correlation between circumstances such as being unemployed, being from a low-income background, having a lack of qualifications and being disabled, and having lower Index scores. The data also shows that young women still have an overall Index score that is two points lower than the score for young men.
- Of these factors, the lowest score of 61 was reported by young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET). This is in stark contrast to the score for those who are in employment, education or training, which is nine points higher, and the overall 2024 Index score, which is eight points higher.
- There is also a large gap between the scores for abled young people and disabled young people, which stand at 71 and 62 respectively.
- Young people from poorer backgrounds, who are indicated in this study as those who received free school meals, have an overall happiness and confidence score that is two points lower than that of their more affluent peers. There is a similar gap between the scores for those who did not attain more than five GCSEs graded A-C (or equivalent) and those who did.

Other barriers and frustrations seen by Careers Wales:

- Many colleges have significantly reduced the number of level 1 courses available so young people who start on a taster/vocational access style course often can't progress unless they can jump to a level 2 course. The qualification requirements for a level 2 course are often too challenging for many customers with ALN making engagement and progression limited in FE for those with learning difficulties.
- The inconsistent interpretation of Additional Learning Provision (ALP) is leading to pupils not getting Individual Development Plans (IDPs) in school which impacts on the support they get if they move on to college - Estyn have recently produced a second thematic report on ALNET.
- Young people with behavioural issues are often the most difficult to place. Most Pupil Referral Units end their provision at 16 so young people must leave even if they aren't emotionally ready.
- Young people on EOTAS are significantly more likely to be NEET than other young people. EOTAS NEET = 22.4%, PLASC Destinations NEET = 2.2%



What support is available for learners to improve access (financial or otherwise)?

[Support Finder](#) from Careers Wales is a list of community support services to help customers get a job, learn how to be more confident, get employability skills, or help with money or funding.

Currently there are 64 programmes listed on Support Finder. A customer can search and filter the support and information required by setting preferences relevant to their situation and needs. The tool provides contact and summary information for agencies offering support for 30 focussed areas ranging from childcare to debt and financial issues, employability support to housing support, mental health conditions and more. There are 31 agencies currently listed in Support Finder who offering debt or financial support.

Is there any regional variation in the information and support provided about post-16 across Wales? Are there any particular challenges facing learners in rural areas?

Young people can expect to receive the same quality and service from Careers Wales regardless of which part of Wales they are in.

The service is monitored in terms of productivity, penetration rates as well as quality in the same way, locally, regionally and nationally with agreed key performance indicators and underpinning performance indicators.

We are not collating any data which will confirm/unconfirm regional differences surrounding the information and support provided about post 16 options. However, when we surveyed careers advisers they provided anecdotal feedback on lack of subject choices and transport difficulties in some regions, for example:

- 'I work with some learners from rural areas who are very limited with post 16 options due to the distances they would have to travel to study courses of their choice. JGW+ is also an issue due to the distances young people from rural areas would have to travel.'
- 'Transport is a major challenge. This limits a young person's options. Both my schools are in agricultural areas and there are no agricultural courses that they can access without considerable travel.'



- 'Rurality has huge impact on learners. Accessing basic courses can incur hours of travelling, which deters a large percentage of learners following their desired course or occupational area.'

Are there any other equality issues?

Careers advisers report several issues relating to equity in post 16, these are predominately centred around transport, provision, language barriers and poverty. Some advisers report some college application processes can be challenging without family support or support from a professional.

The following comments were made by careers advisers when discussing this topic:

- Pupils in poverty do not have access to laptops for their own research at home. They often have shared email and phone details with the parent. This causes huge problems with applications.
- I work in a school with a high level of diversity, many languages are spoken and many students are English as an Additional Language. I find that there is a particularly high demand for advice and guidance from Careers Wales. Students may be unable to access support they need at home as parents may not understand the education system themselves. The fact that the schools is biased towards promoting their own sixth form means it's only the Careers Wales service that ensures students are aware of all post 16 options.
- In terms of equality, it is unfair that pupils accessing JGW+ can earn £60-£75 a week regardless of how much their parents earn and those going to college can only get £40 a week which is means tested.

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?

Careers Wales is contractually obliged to provide the Welsh Government with data on the destinations of pupils from all maintained and special needs schools who are at or above the



school leaving age. Destinations provide a useful snapshot of pupil destinations which informs careers staff in their work with clients, parents, teachers and employers.

The data collected also proves an invaluable aid to partners involved in planning learning, training and employment opportunities. We compile the survey from data supplied to us. We rely on partner institutions sharing student information to provide as full a picture as possible. The results of the destinations survey are published annually on Careers Wales website for all partners to access. The data is ratified by Welsh Government KAS department prior to publication.

This data is a good starting point for understanding trends and informing what education institutions deliver. However, the data is only collated on school students, and therefore there is a gap in tracking college students once they leave their first destination, this accounts for around 57% of the year 11 cohort annually.

Careers Wales have presented the Welsh Government with a prototype of an all-Wales data intelligence hub, which could utilise data from Careers Wales, schools, colleges, local authorities and Department for Work and Pensions. The Welsh Government should consider further development of an all-Wales Data Hub that will inform careers guidance and local authority service provision, allow education providers to consider the appropriateness of their learning offer to fulfil the needs/aspirations of learners, but also inform analysis and evidence for the needs of current and future labour markets and industries.

In addition to this, Careers Wales currently facilitates the 5 Tier Model on behalf of Welsh Government as part of the Youth Engagement and Progression Framework, this model is used to track young people between the ages of 16 and 18 through their various destinations. This data is provided to local authorities for strategic planning and supporting young people.

Welsh Government's role

How effective is the Welsh Government's approach to support participation in the full range of post-16 education and training options?

Careers Wales welcomed the 14 – 16 learning guidance that outlines the learner entitlement during Year 10 and 11 and the focus on CWRE and that all learners must be provided with a course of careers education and ensured access to information from Careers Wales.

Careers and work-related experiences (CWRE) is a cross-cutting theme through the Curriculum for Wales for learners aged 3 – 16. Providing young people with CWRE is fundamental for the development of young people's skills for work and life. Careers Wales provide schools with



resources and professional learning to develop their CWRE provision. We welcome the Welsh Governments proposal of developing performance measures that will monitoring achievements against the learner entitlement that will be included in Estyn's inspection of secondary schools from September 2025. Careers Wales welcomes the development of the new skills suite as part of the qualification reform and support the need to develop the skills for work offer.

We also welcome the introduction of 'dedicated curriculum time' for learners to explore post 16 options. This is a considerable step forward and we are eager to understand how this will be monitored across Wales.

Are learners, their families and schools aware of available Wales-wide support and programmes, such as the Young Person's Guarantee?

The Young Person's Guarantee (YPG) provides all young people between the ages of 16 and 24 with the offer of support to gain a place in education, training or an apprenticeship, employment or self-employment. Working Wales, provides support to access programmes such as Job Growths Wales and ReACT+.

Feedback from young people in the National Conversations (phase 3) indicated that more needs to be done to raise awareness of both young people and their parents/carers to the breadth of opportunities available to them. Young people indicated that lack of work experience, financial constraints, mental health, lack of transport and uncertainty around options impacted on their decision making. Whilst Careers Wales play a key role in providing young people and their parents with up-to-date information on all options, there is a need for increased partnership work to ensure all young people access information and experiences. The Careers Pathways Pilot in Ynys Môn highlights the advantage of key stakeholders working together to provide a collaborative approach to presenting information and experiences.

There are currently long waiting lists for places on programmes such as Jobs Growth Wales, however Welsh Government have provided an additional £2million in the current financial year to support this need.



Outcomes from Dr Hefin David MS's 'Transitions to Employment' report.

Careers Wales welcomed the Transitions to Employment report in June 2023 and were pleased to see recommendations linked to areas where Careers Wales can support, specifically around providing CWRE, work experience, targeted work experience and support for ALN young people in accessing Job Coaching.

Until 2015, Careers Wales managed the work experience placing service, where 90% of KS4 were placed. This provision was removed from the remit of Careers Wales by the Welsh Government with the expectation that schools would continue to offer work experience to their learners and risk assess placements themselves. The current offer for young people is fragmented and dependent on individual schools and local authorities funding a vetting service. Careers Wales would support the need to conduct a feasibility study around the demand and appetite of schools and local authorities to re-instate a central work experience placing service.

Useful links:

[YPG National Conversation Research Report ENGLISH](#)

[14 to 16 learning guidance - Hwb](#)

[Young Person's Guarantee generation Z series: annual report 2023 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

Agenda Item 5

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 40

Ymateb gan: Ffederasiwn Hyfforddiant Cenedlaethol Cymru
Response from: National Training Federation Wales (NTFW)

1. Quality of Information: The quality of information provided to learners about post-16 options is crucial. It is essential that learners receive comprehensive and unbiased information about both vocational and academic routes, including further education, sixth form, apprenticeships, training, and higher education. This ensures they can make informed decisions about their future. However more needs to be done to ensure engagement is consistent and with all providers i.e., Apprenticeship providers, colleges etc

2. Effectiveness of Careers Support: Careers support at compulsory school age should be proactive and engaging. It should help students understand their strengths, interests, and the various career paths available to them. Effective careers support can significantly impact students' post-16 choices and reduce the number of young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET). An excellent example of effective career advice and work experience is the Cardiff Commitment however this needs to be available to all 22 Local Authorities and can be used to engage schools with providers, college etc and provide meaningful work-related experiences helping young people transition into Post 16 education and training

3. Changes in Routes Post-18: There has been a noticeable shift in learners' choices post-18, including a decline in higher education enrolments. It is important to understand the reasons behind these changes and address any barriers that may be preventing students from pursuing higher education.

Apprenticeships had a 72% attainment rate in 22/23, stats Wales data shows various reasons why learners don't complete their apprenticeship and this varies by level from failure to achieve to gaining employment (this could be elsewhere or at the employer) to personal reasons

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2024-03/learner-outcome-measures-for-apprenticeships-and-adult-learning-august-2022-july-2023-808.pdf>

4. Welsh-Medium Provision: Ensuring that post-16 options are available through the medium of Welsh is vital for preserving the language and culture. This provision should be accessible and promoted to encourage more students to choose Welsh-medium education. We have very good support from Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol.

5. Equity of Access: Equity of access to post-16 education and training is a significant concern. Some groups of learners, particularly those from low-income households or rural areas, may face barriers to accessing these opportunities. It is essential to provide financial and other support to ensure all learners have equal access.

Anecdotally – some apprentices may struggle with the initial costs of travel/equipment until they receive their first salary payment

We are not aware of any support for apprentices to cover travel/meal/equipment costs

Anecdotally – There are more challenges for learners in rural areas to get to employment opportunities if they don't have their own transport – plus travel costs may be higher if they have to travel further.

6. Post-16 Destination Data: Collecting comprehensive post-16 destination data is crucial for understanding trends and making informed decisions about education provision. This data should be used to identify gaps and improve the support and opportunities available to learners.

The only data we could find is this form 2019/20

<https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2022-10/consistent-performance-measures-for-post-16-learning-learner-destinations-august-2019-to-july-2020-947.pdf>

7. Welsh Government's Role: The Welsh Government plays a key role in ensuring that the education system supports all learners effectively. This includes providing adequate funding, resources, and policies to promote equity and access to post-16 education and training.

Young Person's guarantee is well advertised however JGW+ is not under the remit of Medr therefore it is unclear how post education and training will be promoted going forward? Medr said under Strategic Aim 1 'Promote opportunities for learning, from pre-16 transition to all-age learning.' It's too early to see evidence of this.

<https://www.medr.cymru/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Medr-Strategic-plan-Sep2024-English.pdf>

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

RET 19

Ymateb gan: Prifysgol Cymru

Response from: Universities Wales

About Universities Wales

Universities Wales represents the interests of universities in Wales. Our membership encompasses the Vice Chancellors of all the universities in Wales and the Open University in Wales. Our mission is to support a university education system which transforms lives through the work Welsh universities do with the people and places of Wales and the wider world.

Universities Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry.

Key messages

- Wales is experiencing some of the **most alarming post-16 participation challenges** we've seen in many years. There is clear, consistent and real evidence that fewer people in Wales are engaging with education or training beyond compulsory education.
- **There is a participation problem across the nation** – we have increasing numbers of those **not in any form of education or training**. [Careers Wales data](#) demonstrates that the proportion of school-leavers not pursuing full-time education post-16 (either at college or sixth form) is at its highest since 2013.
- This year **fewer people from Wales went to university than at any point in the past decade**. The gap in 18-year-old participation between Wales and the UK as a whole is also at its widest in recent history, creating a scenario where cohorts of young people are less well-qualified than their immediate predecessors, with Wales lagging behind the rest of the UK. This is despite Wales having the most generous package of student support.
- The pipeline for higher education is declining – **far too few young people in Wales are undertaking A Levels**. [In England, 47% of school leavers go on to study A Levels, compared to just 33% in Wales](#). Particularly in recent times,

sixth form A Level students are far more likely to enter higher education than those engaged with other routes. **Fewer 16-year-olds undertaking A Levels means fewer students moving into higher education and higher-skilled jobs.** There has also been a decline in BTEC students applying for university.

- **Long-standing generational inequality is being baked in** – a report by the [Wales Centre for Public Policy](#) shows that the correlation between socio-economic background and educational outcomes is stronger in Wales than elsewhere in the UK. **The gap in higher education participation between the most and least disadvantaged is wider in Wales than elsewhere in the UK.** Furthermore, parental qualifications have a direct bearing on their children's qualifications.

Why this matters – the value of higher education

- Individuals are **losing out on the [benefits of a university education](#)** – including a significant boost to salary, employment levels and a graduate's career prospects throughout life, with a generational impact.
- Studies show that [higher education is a driver of better physical and mental health](#), even after accounting for other biographical factors, such as socioeconomic background and gender. **The benefits of higher education are felt by the children of graduates too**, and these cross-generational benefits are estimated to be worth at least as much as the financial benefits of increased earnings.
- **By the age of 31, [graduates are earning 37% more than non-graduates](#)** with at least two A-levels. Data on both actual and projected lifetime earnings of recent graduates shows significant benefits relative to non-graduates, including non-graduates with similar prior educational attainment.
- **Wales will need more people with graduate level skills** to grapple with automation, maintain public services, grow Wales' economy and tackle issues such as climate change. [Research](#) has shown that more than **400,000 extra graduates will be needed in Wales by 2035** in order to respond to skills gaps and workforce challenges of the future.
- Wales is facing an **increasing skills gap** with the rest of the UK.

Recommendations

- **Welsh Government and Medr should improve the available dataset** on post-16 trajectories and destinations to inform policy interventions.

- **Welsh Government** should avoid setting targets in only one area of post-16 provision, which has a detrimental impact on the advice, guidance and the broad mix of qualifications promoted to learners.
- **Medr and Welsh Government should set a target for A level entries** in Wales to ensure that young people in Wales take full advantage of their potential, strengthening the pipeline for entry into higher education, in line with the rest of the UK.
- Welsh Government should **consider raising the compulsory school age** for full-time education or training to 18.
- **Pathways to university** – More effort needs to be made to allow and support learners to access university via a range of flexible pathways, and to develop the talent pipeline ensuring nobody is cut off from accessing higher-level qualifications.
- Targets should be set to **shrink the gap in university participation between the most and least disadvantaged**. Accordingly, the **Seren programme should be reviewed and refocused** to encourage and enable those from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who are the least likely to apply for university, to do so.
- A target should be set to **increase the rate of participation in higher education** among Welsh-domiciled learners.
- The [Study in Wales](#) brand should be **deployed domestically** to encourage Welsh young people to study at Wales' universities.

Consultation questions

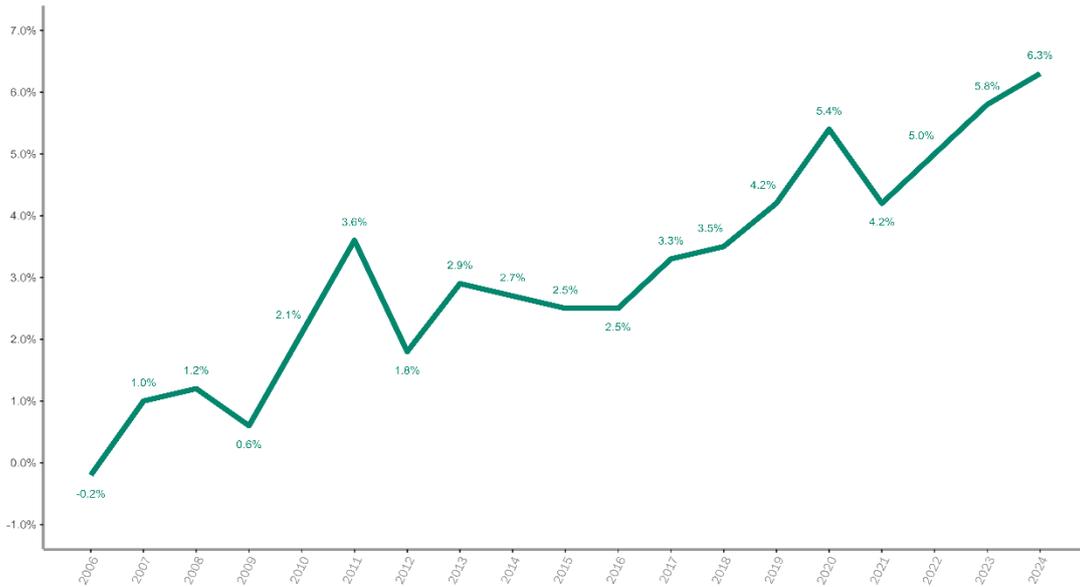
1. Quality of information given to learners about the full range of post-16 options (vocational and academic routes post 16, i.e. further education, sixth form, apprenticeships and training, and onward to higher education)
 - Quality and nature of information provided to learners within schools and those educated other than at school (EOTAS).
 - Quality and nature of information provided directly to learners by Careers Wales.

The data demonstrate that Wales is lagging behind the rest of the UK in terms of young people going to university.

UCAS [data](#) reveals that the **gap between participation in higher education in Wales and the UK average is now 6.3 percentage points, the largest gap on record.**

Percentage point difference in entry rates for 18-year-olds from Wales and UK (All)

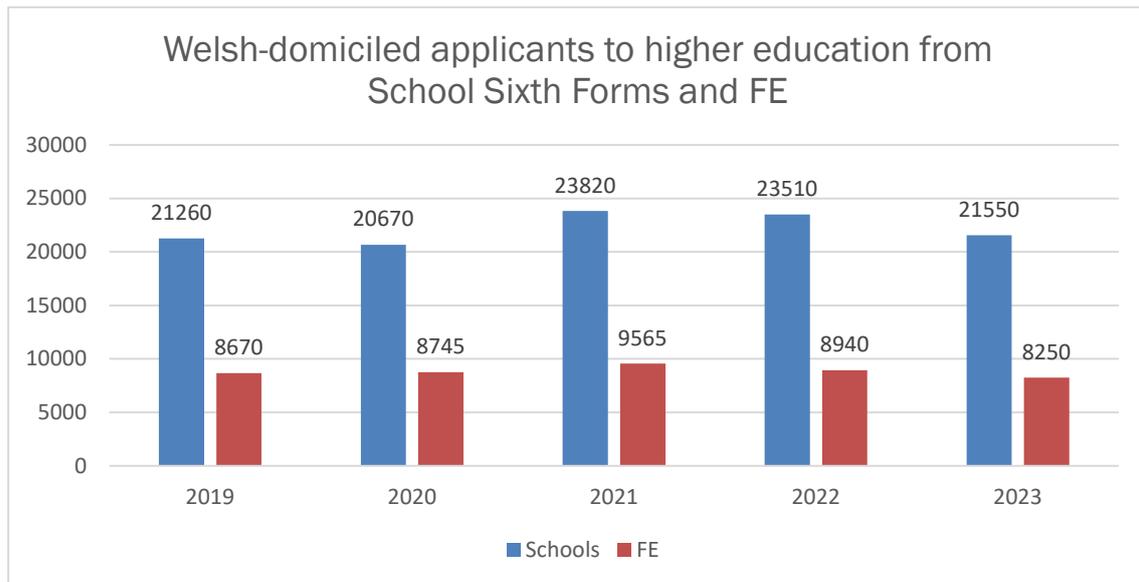
Entry rates for Welsh students were 6.3 percentage points lower than the UK average in 2024, the largest gap on record.



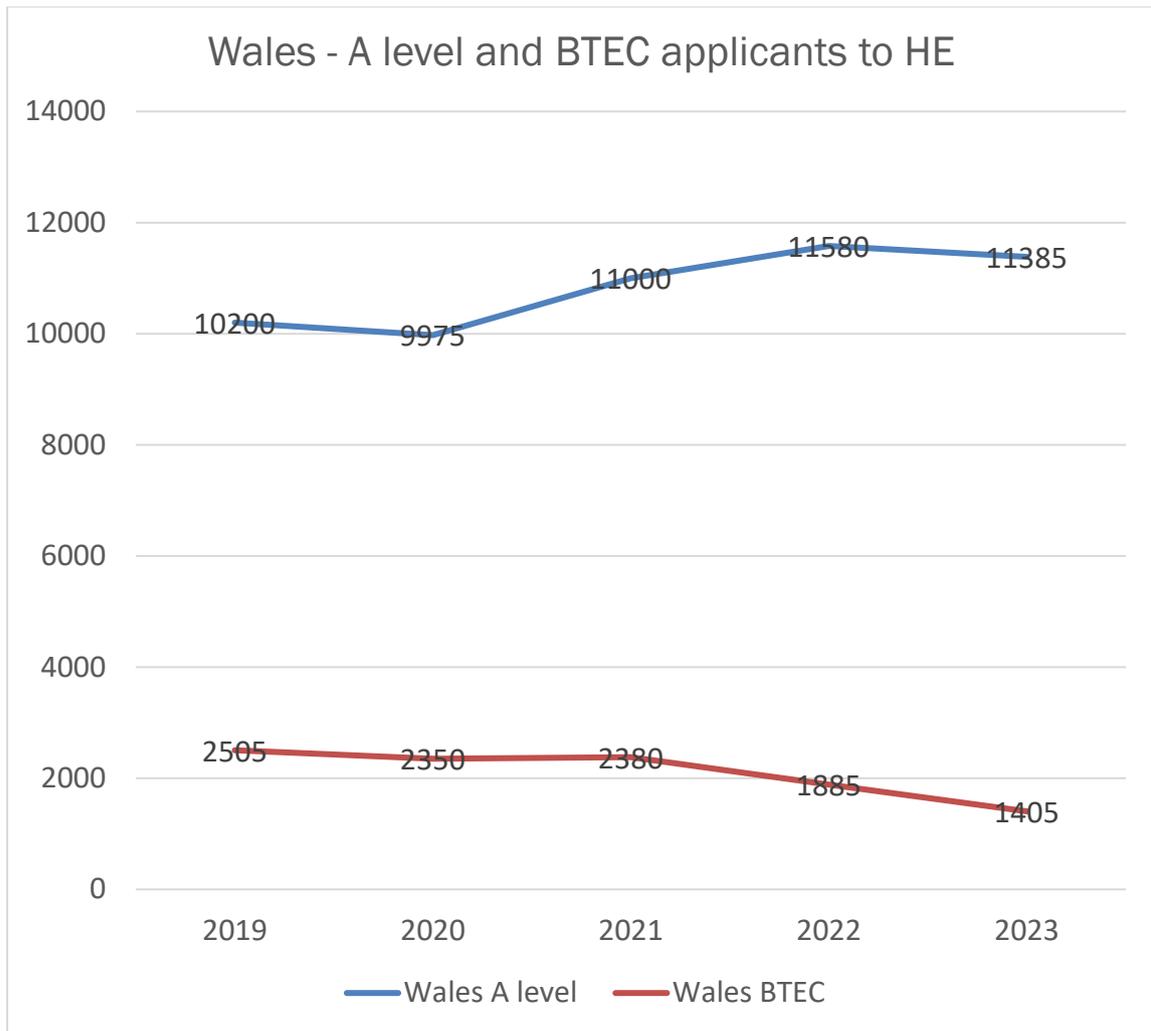
Source: UCAS 2024 End of Cycle data, December 2024

Fewer 16–18-year-olds are taking A Levels. A Levels are more commonly accessed in sixth forms (although in some areas of Wales these do not exist), while vocational courses are more often done via FE routes. In terms of the future of [Wales’ skilled workforce](#), many professions will continue to require A Levels as the accepted and expected route into higher education and professional qualifications. The decline in A Level participation is accompanied by a drop in students applying to university via BTECs.

Schools currently generate larger numbers of university applicants than FE. Research undertaken by Universities Wales using UCAS data on licence demonstrates the relationship between settings and qualification type in relation to accessing higher education.



Note: 2019 is considered to be the most suitable comparator to 2023, as academic years from 2020-2022 were impacted by Covid.



Universities readily accept BTEC qualifications for entry to relevant qualifications, they are particularly valued in the creative industries and other courses that entail some more practical elements such as nursing. It is therefore concerning that there has been a declining trend in Welsh applicants to university coming through the BTEC route.

Inequality is being baked in, with social background and availability of sixth forms seriously skewing where and how our young people study (or indeed whether they pursue education or training at all).

Given that Wales has the most generous package of student financial support in the UK but is lagging behind on participation, **it is vital to better understand the reasons why young people are not opting to go to university.**

It should therefore be part of Welsh Government's focus in addressing the participation challenge to seek to **understand the efficacy of independent advice and guidance** being provided, and to **improve the dataset** available to inform policy levers.

- **The extent to which further education colleges are able to engage directly with learners in schools.**

Universities Wales is not equipped to provide comment on how colleges are able to engage with school pupils. However, we will use this question to set out some of the ways in which universities engage with schools.

As part of their **widening access strategies and civic engagement**, universities in Wales cultivate relationships with local schools through visits and mentoring programmes. This can vary depending on the capacity and staff time.

For example, [The Children's University project](#) provides school pupils with the opportunity to learn in a rich range of contexts, experience new places, visit universities and attend their own graduation ceremonies.

The [Physics Mentoring](#) and [Modern and Foreign Languages Mentoring](#) programmes provide opportunities for undergraduate students to act as mentors to school pupils in these subject areas, providing support for learners who may not have had the confidence to study in this area and excellent opportunities for mentoring. This in turn can [increase aspiration among undergraduates](#) to consider teaching as a prospective career, and [increase aspiration among school pupils to apply for university](#). The Physics Mentoring project saw a [100% increase in participants declaring that they 'definitely will' take Physics A Level](#) in the 2022-23 academic year.

While programmes such as these are aimed at building ambition and awareness in school pupils that higher education is a viable and achievable future step for them, not all schools will have these links.

Feedback from universities suggests that, in some cases, it has become increasingly difficult for them to maintain direct contact with secondary pupils as their timetables have become more crowded in recent times, with increased pressures on exam revision and teacher workload making it harder to engage.

- **The extent to which learners in schools are made aware of the options available to them in school sixth forms and local further education colleges, and how closely schools engage with local colleges. Are there any conflicts of interest between sixth forms and further education colleges and is this more prevalent in some areas of Wales more than others?**

[Careers Wales data](#) demonstrate that the proportion of school-leavers not pursuing full-time education (either at college or sixth form) is at its highest since 2013.

Of those who do continue in education, [52% go into vocational learning programmes](#).

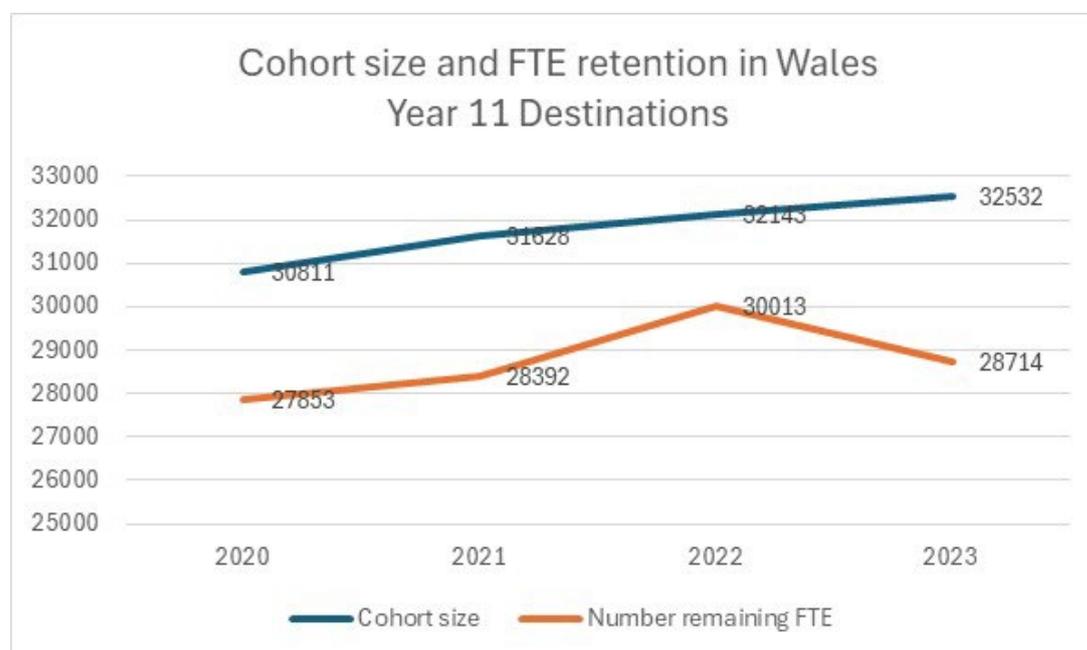
This may be linked to the attainment of Welsh learners at the age of 16. PISA scores indicate that Wales seriously lags behind its European neighbours, and

there is a correlation in the data that links overall school leaving age to attainment. The potential for learning to end at 16 for some students would appear to lower attainment and ambition for the cohort as a whole.

Nation	PISA 2022 Score	Compulsory education age
England	1,491	18
Poland	1,477	18
Sweden	1,463	18
Belgium	1,439	18
Austria	1,458	18
Latvia	1,452	18
Germany	1,447	18
France	1,435	16
Croatia	1,421	16
Wales	1,405	16
Vietnam	1,403	15

Source: [PISA Scores by Country 2024](#) and [Pisa: Wales slumps to worst school test results - BBC News](#)

Wales also has the highest proportion of vocational students at this level in the UK, which would suggest that our mix of qualifications may not be correct. **Welsh Government set a target and announced policy for [apprenticeship participation](#), but not an accompanying target or policy for A Levels, or other goals.**



The above graph demonstrates a drop in the number of school-leavers staying in full-time education, with increasing numbers leaving full-time education at 16. In 2023, almost 4,000 16-year-olds left full-time education.

At the same time, while universities in Wales have historically recruited from **BTEC** courses with ~2,500 Welsh students entering higher education from BTEC routes until 2021, this suddenly nosedived to only 1,405 in 2023.¹ Sixth forms have provided a steady stream of university applicants, and despite numbers studying in sixth forms dipping, numbers recruited from this route are now above pre-pandemic levels.

Given that Wales is lagging behind the rest of the UK in terms of entry to university, careful consideration should be given to any future closures of sixth forms, and there should be a review of the impact on communities where sixth forms have been closed to ensure that young people are not further disadvantaged.

Furthermore, it is very concerning that data drawn from [Careers Wales Year 11 destinations](#) survey taken from the 2022 GCSE cohort indicates that in Wales, an increasing proportion of school leavers are not continuing **in any kind of full-time education**.

The Seren Programme is arguably perpetuating a message to a majority of able learners that university is ‘not for them’ – the selective nature of the scheme rules out plenty of school pupils that have the potential to gain a university education, while providing opportunities aimed at those already most likely to go to university.

- **The extent to which employers are able to engage directly with learners in schools, for example at careers events.**
- **Who else influences learners future career choices (e.g. parents, teachers, peers), and how well are those people supported to do this.**

Parents are clearly one of the key influences over the choices their children make. We know that the children of graduates are more likely to go to university, this is illustrated by the [Wales Centre for Public Policy report](#) data which demonstrate that **parents’ level of education is a marker for whether a student will go onto study A level**.

Children of parents with a L4+ qualification enrol on A levels at a rate of 49%, while those whose parents have qualifications ranging between none and L3 enrol at a rate of 15 – 34%. Key to this is helping them understand how the student finance system works. A [recent report by David Willetts](#) demonstrates the economic benefit felt individually and by society of university education. His report sets out how higher education is a driver of better physical and mental health, even after accounting for other biographical factors, such as socioeconomic background and gender. **The benefits of higher education are felt by the children of graduates too**, and these cross-generational benefits are estimated to be worth at least as much as the financial benefits of increased earnings.

¹ This data is held on licence from UCAS by Universities Wales

Another related issue is that **Welsh graduates studying in England increasingly stay in England**, while fewer English students studying in Wales remain in Wales, giving the Welsh economy lower levels of access to graduate skills. In comparison to other parts of the country, Wales lags behind on application rates to university. In London, more than 50% of 18-year-olds are accepted into higher education. **In Wales we have the second lowest rate in the UK, at around 30%, and the lowest rate of any UK nation, and have had no meaningful improvement in the last decade.**

2. How effective careers support is at compulsory school age

- **To what extent careers support at pre-16 is resulting in positive or negative outcomes post-16 e.g. young people finding themselves not in education, employment or training (NEET).**

Anecdotally, there would appear to be a **lack of awareness** among learners, parents and teachers as to the accessibility of higher education, and specifically the availability and function of student finance for Welsh domiciled students.

There is a need for **improved public awareness around student support.**

There is a vital need to drive up ambition and aspiration among learners from an early age, to ensure all school pupils in Wales are aware of the opportunities presented by higher education, and routes to higher-level skills. A holistic look at advice and guidance available right through the education pipeline will be needed to build ambition and future-proof the Welsh workforce as part of an integrated education plan.

- **Whether work experience opportunities for learners of compulsory school are operational, effective and meaningful and any barriers in that regard.**

Universities Wales is not well-placed to respond to this question.

3. 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?**

As mentioned above, Wales is experiencing an alarming participation challenge in higher education.

The proportion of Welsh-domiciled 18-year-olds entering higher education is lower than the UK, with the **gap between Wales' participation rate and the UK rate now the widest on record, at 6.3 percentage points.** In 2006-2009 the gap was negligible, varying from -0.2% to 1%, meaning Wales' participation rate was largely on a par with the UK average. Since then, Wales has lagged behind significantly.

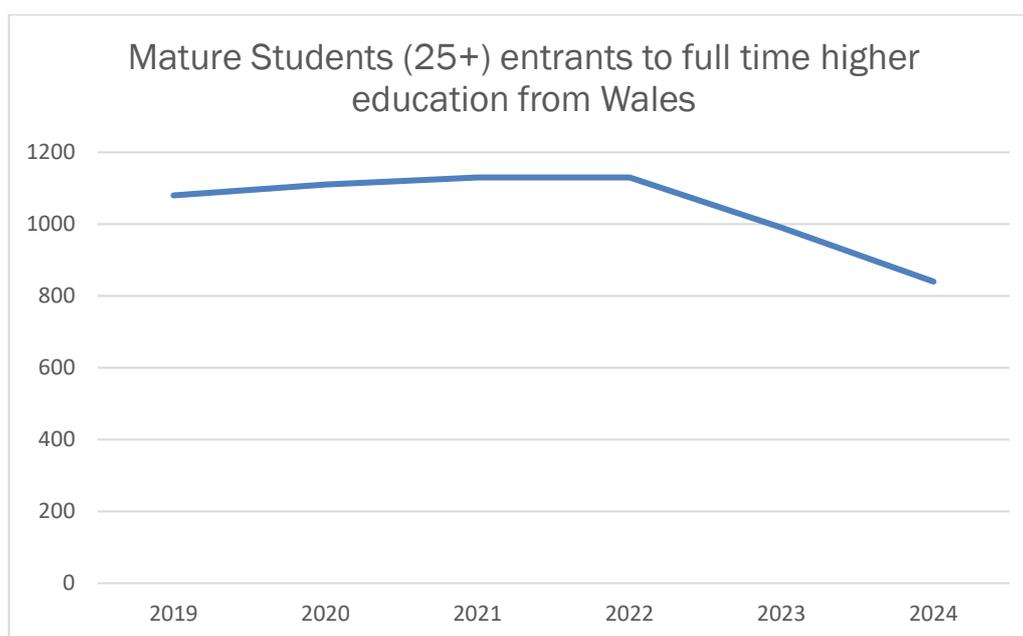
As a result, Wales is lagging behind the UK in terms of developing the higher-level skills needed for the future economy, and a generation is missing out on the economic, health and career benefits of university education.

Part of the challenge is that the **pipeline for higher education is being squeezed**, as fewer Welsh learners are undertaking A Levels. [In England, 47% of school leavers go on to study A Levels, compared to just 33% in Wales](#). Particularly in recent times, sixth form A Level students are far more likely to enter higher education than those engaged with other post-16 routes. **Fewer 16-year-olds undertaking A Levels means fewer students moving into higher education and higher-skilled jobs**. There has also been a decline in BTEC students applying for university.

At the same time, [52% of post-16 learners](#) enrol on vocational learning programmes rather than A Levels. Wales has the highest proportion of vocational students at this level in the UK, which would suggest that our mix of qualifications may not be correct. **Welsh Government set a target and announced policy for [apprenticeship participation](#), but not an accompanying target or policy for A Levels, or other goals.**

While there has been a concerted effort to promote the benefits of apprenticeships, with a government target and supportive policy statements pushing this agenda, there has not been an equivalent drive to promote the benefits of A Levels and the opportunities these qualifications can unlock. As such, with a view to driving up participation across the post-16 landscape, **Welsh Government and Medr should set a target for A Level participation across Wales.**

In terms of the broader landscape of higher education provision, consideration should also be given to changes in take-up among full-time mature students and part-time learners.



Wales has seen a drop in the number of mature students applying and enrolling in full-time higher education, and changes in the part-time market. Unlocking better, more flexible routes to higher-skilled qualifications will be key to addressing these trends.

Worryingly, according to the recent [British Council Next Generation 2024 report](#), 18-30-year-olds in Wales feel that their standard of living is lower than that of their parents. Within this, it is notable that in Wales, [young people's perception of the importance of university](#) for their future career is lower than the UK average. The opportunities of a university education to boost life chances are not being grasped, with considerable ramifications for social mobility and social justice in Wales.

4. 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.**

The majority of students entering higher education and studying through the medium of Welsh have followed the sixth form route and Welsh-medium provision at A-level is extremely important for the Welsh-medium HE sector.

Although there has been a substantial increase in Welsh-medium routes available at HE level since the inception of the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol, the number of students studying through the medium of Welsh at HE has plateaued and further investment is needed to maintain and increase provision and participation.

[London Economics Wales' report to the HEFCW in 2023](#) highlighted that courses delivered in Welsh or bilingually have higher costs associated with them due to the comparatively small class sizes. The funding model, therefore, needs to reflect this to maintain and develop suitable progression pathways for all.

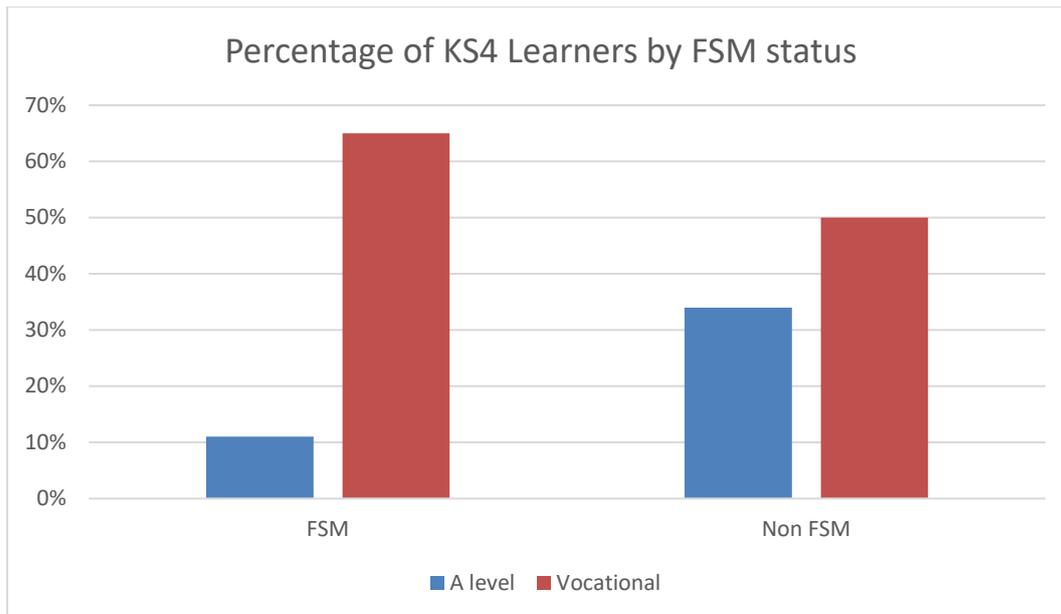
Further investment in Welsh-medium HE provision must be made to achieve the targets related to Cymraeg 2050.

5. Equity of access

- **Are some groups of learners disadvantaged by the current system (e.g. pupils from low-income households, learners with travel needs)?**

Data drawn from the [Wales Centre for Public Policy report](#) indicates that the proportion of key stage 4 learners who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) who progress to A Levels is 11%. Of those that aren't eligible for FSM, 34% go on to do A Levels.

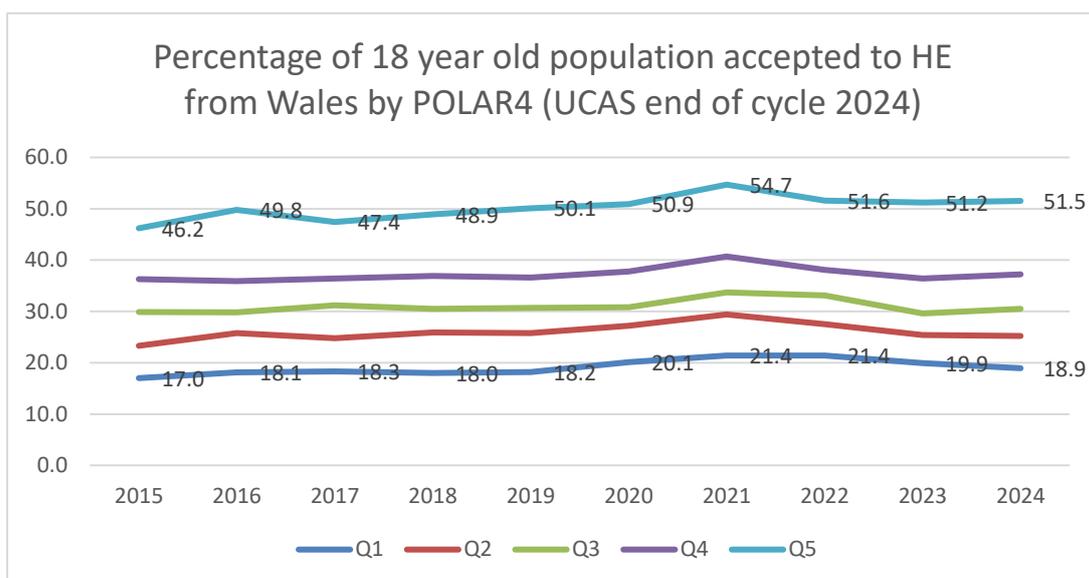
47% of non-FSM students engage with AS levels, compared to 19% of FSM pupils.



We would note that the same report highlights that drop-off rates from AS to A level are concerningly high for some ethnicities.

These patterns are mirrored by POLAR 4 data published by UCAS, which indicates that the participation rate for the most disadvantaged (Q1) students is [significantly lower in Wales](#) than the UK average. In Wales, only 18.5% of Q1 students entered higher education in 2024. The UK average for Q1 is 27.4% - Wales lags by 8.9 percentage points.

In England, the gap between the most and least deprived students' participation rate is [19.3 percentage points](#). In Wales, the gap is [26.4 percentage points](#).



The [UCAS dashboard of end of cycle 2024](#) provides comprehensive resources with regards to undergraduate data.

- **What support is available for learners to improve access (financial or otherwise)?**

The package of student finance, including grants and loans, available to Welsh-domiciled university students is the most generous of the UK nations. Despite this, Welsh Government communication to promote student finance and the university offer in Wales is lacking.

Welsh universities offer a number of routes to help improve access to higher education, including bursaries and hardship funds. Institutions commonly run summer schools, open days, transition programmes, outreach activity and engage in the [Reaching Wider](#) Programme.

Upon engaging with universities, students are able to work with specialist advisors in student services that can advise on financial and mental health support amongst other things.

The [University Ready](#) resource provides a bilingual platform for free support and guidance for students who are going to university for the first time.

As mentioned previously, anecdotal evidence would suggest that learners are not as aware of student financial support as they could be, viewing tuition fees as a barrier to entry. **Welsh Government should seek to improve awareness and understanding of the university offer in Wales, via the development of the sort of communications activity dedicated to apprenticeships, for example.**

- **Is there any regional variation in the information and support provided about post-16 across Wales? Are there any particular challenges facing learners in rural areas?**

Significant support is provided to school pupils engaged on the **Seren programme**. This is not available in all schools, and favours pupils with higher attainment, leaving out those who would be capable of accessing higher education, who are indirectly being told that university is 'not for them'.

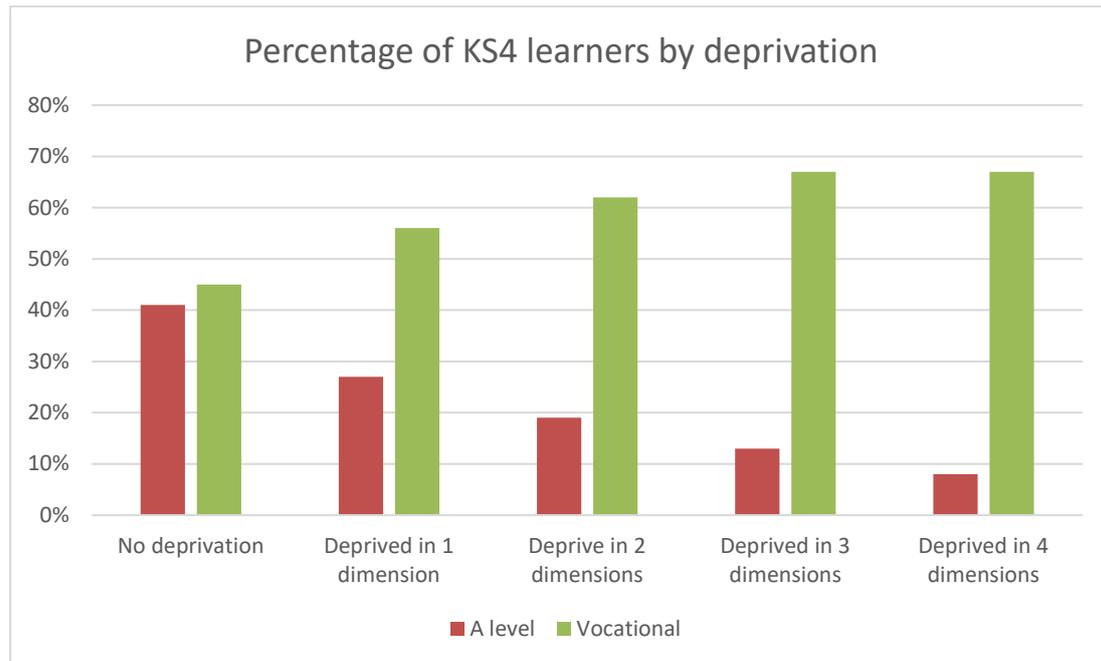
Rurality does not seem to be a key issue in terms of applications to higher education. In terms of UCAS applications, there does not appear to be significant variation between rural and more urban areas. In fact, according to UCAS data², all regions in Wales have a higher participation rate for those considered to be in rural areas than its urban areas. For example, in North Wales the rural rate is 35.6%, the urban is 28%. In Mid and West Wales, the respective figures are 30.6% and 28.5%. In South Wales East they are 32.3% and 27.8%.

² This data is held on licence by Universities Wales

- **Are there any other equality issues?**

The [Wales Centre for Public Policy](#) report notes that progression to Sixth Form was higher among learners who were not recorded as living in deprived households during the 2011 Census (43%) and lowest among those living in households deprived across all four dimensions (13%)

For those experiencing no deprivation (according to the census data referred to in the WCPP report), **entry to A levels is at 41%, sliding to just 8% for those who exhibit deprivation in 4 dimensions.**



In terms of gender, [females tend to be more likely to enter A levels](#) than their male peers. Fluent Welsh speakers are also more likely to become A level students.

Considering the likely intersectionality of these statistics, **deprivation seems to be the defining factor dictating educational progression, and particularly in Wales.**

The socio-economic make up of Wales is not a justifiable explanation for poor participation rates. [POLAR 4 data](#) reveals that despite having similar demographics in terms of deprivation, the north-west region England performs better than Wales in terms of higher education participation.

Overall, a higher proportion of learners in England from the more deprived socio-economic backgrounds enter higher education than their counterparts in Wales:

Rates of entry to higher education	England	Wales
Q1 (most deprived)	24.1%	18.9%
Q2 (second most deprived)	30%	25.2%

Source: [UCAS](#)

6. 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?**

The short answer is no. There is **insufficient data available** to fully understand and interrogate trends on the destinations of school leavers, leaving policy makers and providers in the dark on the precise interventions required to tackle the participation problem.

Medr and the Welsh Government have an opportunity to grasp this challenge and develop better data to help us understand where our young people are and what they choose to do.

We would propose that improved data is required on:

- Destinations of school leavers, particularly monitoring 16-18 year olds
- Awareness of financial support available for accessing higher education among learners, teachers and parents/guardians
- Efficacy of the advice and guidance about post-16 options provided to young people
- The impact of the Seren programme on higher education applications as a whole, not just the cohort engaged on the programme
- The impact of closures of sixth forms on A Level take up and progression to higher education
- BTEC enrolments and progression

However, this is the tip of the iceberg. A better understanding of the reasons behind declining attainment is key.

7. Welsh Government's role

- **How effective is the Welsh Government's approach to support participation in the full range of post-16 education and training options?**

Overall, there is an imbalance in Welsh Government's approach, which is driven by targets that are not serving Wales well.

The Seren Programme is an example of a well-intended policy designed to build pupils' ambition, which is arguably providing enhanced opportunities for high achievers while simultaneously reinforcing the message to the majority of our young people that university is 'not for them'.

Furthermore, **pupils on the Seren Programme are encouraged to apply to universities outside of Wales**. Given that data shows that Wales needs an increased numbers of graduates for the future workforce, and those that leave

Wales for university tend to stay in England during some of their most economically productive years, this is arguably a policy lever that backfires.

[HESA data on graduate outcomes](#) demonstrates this 'brain-drain' effect, with only 1 in 10 English graduates remaining in Wales after graduation compared to a quarter of the Welsh diaspora remaining in England. We need to give serious consideration to securing the talent pipeline.

There are examples of successful initiatives elsewhere that Welsh Government should consider developing to address the dearth of support for school pupils not typically invited to participate in Seren. There should be a particular focus on those from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who are the least likely to apply for university (by the widest margin of all the UK nations) and an integrated approach to the interface with schools.

Case Study: Higher Horizons

The [Higher Horizons](#) scheme targets students across Warrington, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire and Chester. The scheme has significantly **increased participation across all learners**, and achieved a higher education entry rate for students in receipt of Free School Meals at **38%** - 8 percentage points higher than Wales overall rate.

The regional average progression rate for FSM learners across these areas is 18.3% (similar to POLAR Q4 - the second least deprived group of learners in Wales).

The University Connect part of Higher Horizons specifically targets those in TUNDRA quintiles 1 and 2 (the most deprived areas) and the evidence shows that the more activities are engaged with, the higher the chance of the individual engaging with higher education.

In addition, the [Study in Wales](#) brand has been successfully deployed in target markets overseas for the recruitment of international students to Welsh universities and colleges. Welsh Government should make resources available to build upon this brand and **deploy it domestically to raise awareness of the benefits of higher education, and to encourage Welsh young people to study at Wales' universities**. A broad 'Study and Work in Wales' campaign would encourage learners, their parents and teachers to reflect on the excellent quality higher education available in Wales.

- **Are learners, their families and schools aware of available Wales-wide support and programmes, such as the Young Person’s Guarantee?**

Universities Wales is not equipped to answer this question fully. However, we recommend that as part of **improved data gathering** in this area, Welsh Government should explore the levels of awareness of support available.

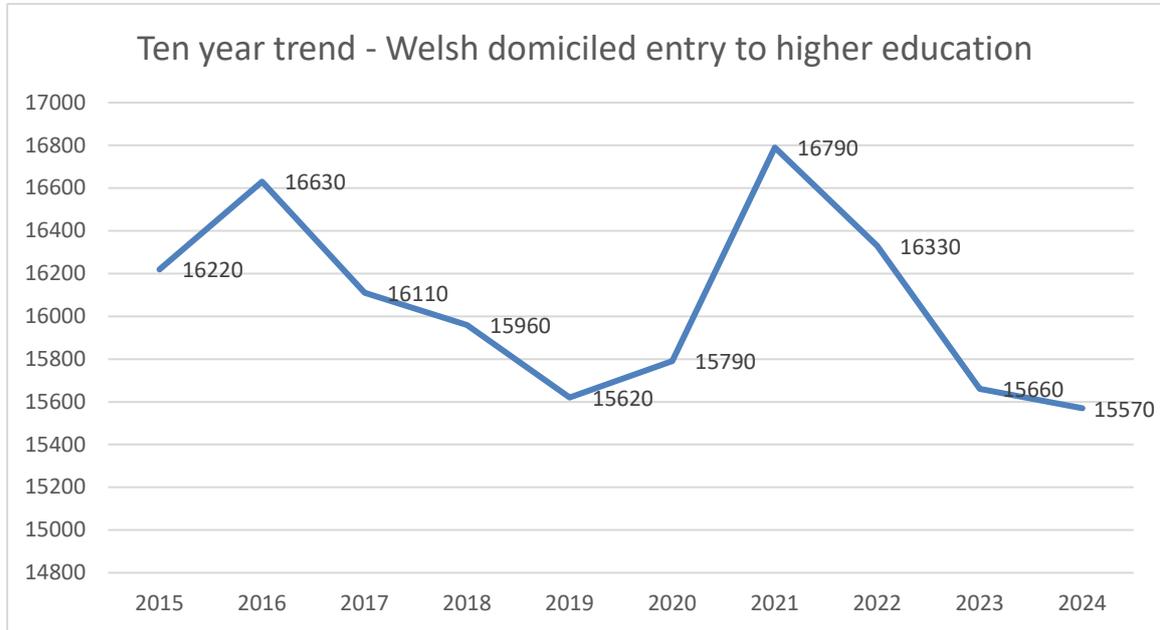
- **Outcomes from Dr Hefin David MS’s [‘Transitions to Employment’](#) report.**

Universities Wales welcomed this report. We particularly agree with the recommendations that improving the transition from further education to university is crucial, as is ensuring learners are informed about the range of opportunities and support available in post-16 education.

Annex: further supporting data

Other supporting data drawn from UCAS

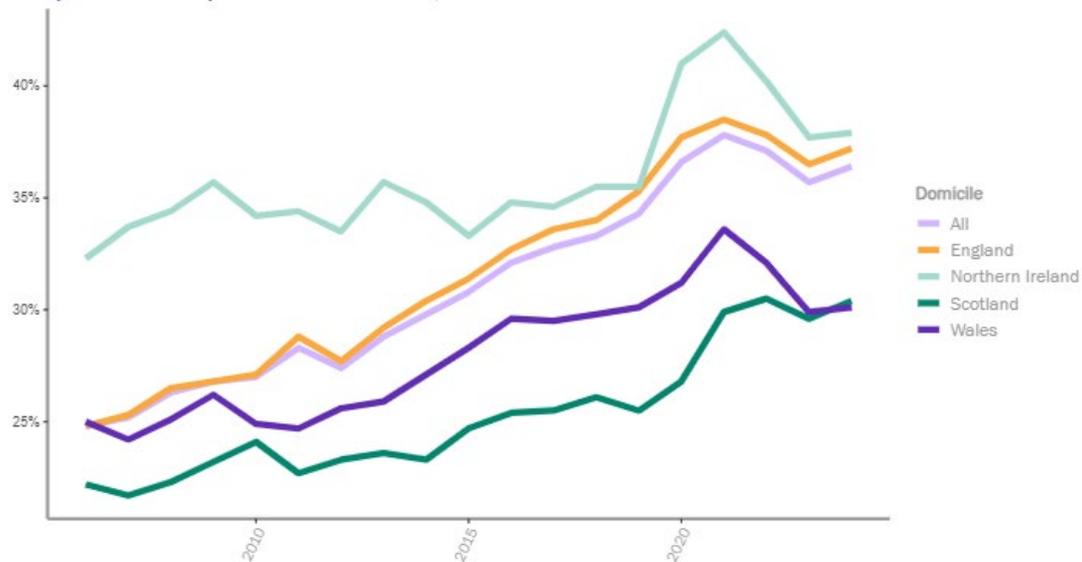
Demonstrating that Welsh-domiciled students' entry to university in the UK are on a downward trend



Proportion of 18-year-olds entering higher education by UK nation – noting Wales is now aligned with Scotland, despite a cap on university places operating in Scotland

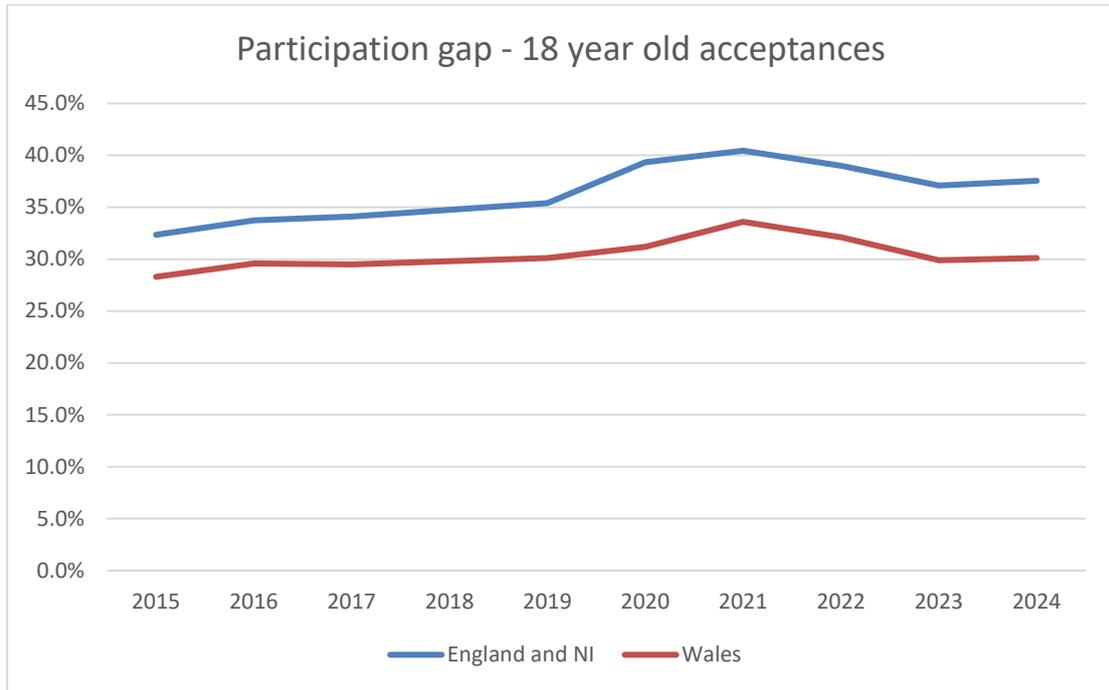
Percentage of 18-year-olds who enter full-time higher education ('entry rate') by student domicile

The entry rate for Welsh 18-year-olds was 30.1% in 2024, the lowest rate of the four UK countries.



Source: UCAS 2024 End of Cycle data, December 2024

Noting the participation gap between nations with similar funding systems (i.e. England and Northern Ireland)





Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA/DB/11299/25

Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee

Buffy Williams MS
Chair, Children, Young People and Education Committee

24 January 2025

Dear Chair,

National Practice Framework/National Multi-Agency Practice Strategy for Children

One of the core elements of our Transformation Programme for Children's Social Care in Wales has been the commitment to deliver a National Practice Framework. The rationale behind developing this Framework has always been to improve consistency of practice across Wales and support a strengths-based way of working to ensure the best outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people in Wales.

A national conversation has been taking place with local authorities and their partners in the delivery of children's social services across Wales including the third sector, police, safeguarding board as well as national bodies including the Children's Commissioner. This engagement and open dialogue centred on gathering opinion and evidence about how a National Practice Framework can add the most value. In the last twelve months we have shared two engagement papers. The papers set out the aim of the Framework and how it will work in practice as well as drafts of recommended standards.

The feedback we received highlighted the critical importance of using this work to strengthen multi-agency working, based around 5 strategic standards: Multi-Agency Infrastructure, Multi-Agency Strategy, Multi-Agency Learning, Multi-Agency Governance and Multi-Agency Delivery. To reflect this strategic approach, the Framework's title has changed to the "National Multi-Agency Practice Strategy for Children".

However, further work is still required, including on strengthening shared accountability for multi-agency practice with greater clarity of roles, responsibilities and ownership of the strategy. In addition, we must have clear governance arrangements in place to oversee implementation which do not increase bureaucracy or cause confusion.

Our original intention had been to publish the Framework by the end of 2024. However, as highlighted what the feedback from this engagement has told us is that this cannot be a standalone document and further work is required to develop a joint accountability framework, practice notes and resources for front line practitioners drawing on the original

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

suite of standards, for example “children and young people who are missing”, with additional supporting guidance.

To allow time to strengthen the Strategy and the 5 multi-agency standards as well as develop the additional resources outlined above, we will be working to publish both the Strategy and the first set of practice notes in April this year. Further practice notes will then be published during 2025 and in April we will also begin work on the development of a joint accountability framework.

I wanted to share this update with you and emphasise the importance of getting this Strategy right and supported by the resources its needs so that it delivers its aim. I will also be publishing a written statement members sharing this timeframe.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Bowden', written in a cursive style.

Dawn Bowden AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Plant a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Minister for Children and Social Care



Children on the margins

Response to the CYPE Committee report (December 2024)

21/01/2025

In December 2024, the Children, Young People and Education Committee published the findings of its inquiry into children on the margins (relating to missing children and those experiencing or at risk of criminal exploitation). The report includes 23 recommendations.

This is the Welsh Government's response to the recommendations.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Response to the 23 recommendations.....	4
Recommendation 1.....	4
Recommendation 2.....	4
Recommendation 3.....	5
Recommendation 4.....	6
Recommendation 5.....	6
Recommendation 6.....	6
Recommendation 7.....	7
Recommendation 8.....	7
Recommendation 9.....	8
Recommendation 10.....	9
Recommendation 11.....	9
Recommendation 12.....	10
Recommendation 13.....	10
Recommendation 14.....	11
Recommendation 15.....	12
Recommendation 16.....	12
Recommendation 17.....	13
Recommendation 18.....	14
Recommendation 19.....	14
Recommendation 20.....	15
Recommendation 21.....	16
Recommendation 22.....	16
Recommendation 23.....	17

Introduction

The Inquiry into Children on the Margins has provided an important opportunity to reflect on the work already undertaken in this area and to focus on what we want to achieve in the future.

We have achieved progress in responding to the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. We have brought forward regulation to strengthen the safeguarding, governance and training requirements on independent schools; to require the teaching and learning support staff at independent schools to register with the Education Workforce Council; and, to regulate Special School Residential Services, in a similar manner to care homes for children, as a regulated service under the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. .

We will continue to engage with our stakeholders to achieve the best outcomes and protections for all children.

We offer thanks to the Children, Young People and Education Committee for their report and their recommendations in relation to children on the margins. We have set out our response to the recommendations below.

Response to the 23 recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should work with local authorities and police forces to take robust, immediate action to ensure that the data it publishes relating to children missing from care and missing episodes among children receiving care and support (received from local authorities) are accurate and reliable. The Welsh Government should report back to us within 6 months to provide an update on the issues identified by the partnership and action taken.

Response: Accept (subject to discussion on timescale).

The Welsh Government has established a Performance and Improvement Framework for Social Services to guide local authorities in measuring and improving their social care services.

The Performance and Improvement Framework includes data on the total number of reports of children who go missing from care and a total number of children who go missing from care during the year.

In order to improve this data we added a 'missing person measure' to the Children's Census 2023/24 collection to capture the number of times each child/young person have gone missing in the collection year. As this is the first year of the measure being included in the data collection, we acknowledge that further work may be needed to ensure consistent reporting.

Last year the Welsh Government established a 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who are reported Missing from Home or Care' Stakeholder Steering group. The group will map what data is collected, who undertakes collection of it and where the data is reported to. This will enable the group to identify any gaps and develop further actions to address these gaps. This is likely to involve further maturation of measures currently being reported. The group has representation from police forces and specialist officers who have a lead for safeguarding children who go missing from home or care. The group is multi-agency to reflect the multiple agencies who are involved with children who go missing.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should carry out a feasibility study into the development of data release that is as accurate, reliable and as exhaustive as feasibly possible, covering all episodes of children who go missing in Wales. The data should be broken down separately by age, care experience, local authority, primary reason for going missing (if known), and in conjunction with stakeholders, any other factors the Welsh Government considers useful for policy development purposes

Response: Accept in principle

We accept that further work is required to mature the accuracy and reliability of available data. We have outlined actions being undertaken to mature data relating to missing episodes in our response to Recommendation 1. In light of the actions already in hand we do not propose to undertake a feasibility study. The mapping exercise being undertaken by the 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who are reported Missing from Home or Care' stakeholder steering group will inform next steps.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should amend legislation to make the offer of a return interview a statutory requirement following each missing episode. The child should have the right to decide who carries out that interview from among a pool of trusted and competent adults, and robust statutory guidance should be issued for practitioners to set out clearly how return interviews should be conducted to ensure consistency across Wales. As part of this guidance, the Welsh Government should create a form for practitioners to use which states whether the offer of a return interview was accepted or rejected, for ease of sharing this data with relevant stakeholders.

Response: Accept in principle

We recognise the benefits of return home interviews following missing episodes and there are several examples of good practice across Wales. We commissioned research to inform our approach, but it did not reach a consensus on whether return home interviews should be made mandatory and who should conduct them.

Children and young people who are in care already have a statutory right to access an independent advocate, including when they have been reported missing.

Following a roundtable event in 2024 the Welsh Government established the 'Safeguarding Children and Young People who are reported Missing from Home or Care' stakeholder steering group. The group includes representatives from the National Youth Advocacy Service, the Children's Society, Local Authority Children's Services, the Police, the NHS, the 4Cs, Youth Justice policy and practice, the National Independent Safeguarding Board, Regional Safeguarding Boards, pan-Wales groups such as the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board, the Violence Prevention Unit, the NHS Safeguarding Service and officials representing the Welsh Government.

The stakeholder steering group is developing guidance to ensure children receive an offer of a meeting following a missing episode (acknowledging the principles set out in the 'All-Wales Practice Guide - Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care'). The Welsh Government will ensure the guidance explores the benefits and practicalities of creating a form or recording mechanism for practitioners which states whether the offer of a return interview was accepted or rejected.

Considering the activity being undertaken in this area we do not consider it necessary to amend legislation at this juncture.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should write to the UK Government to advocate for a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation as part of its forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill. The Welsh Government should report back to us with the response it receives, which should also include a summary of any relevant inter-governmental discussions that have taken place since September 2024

Response: Accept in principle

The Welsh Government has engaged, and continues to engage, with the UK Government on the approach to Child Criminal Exploitation in the proposed Crime and Policing Bill. We will continue our dialogue with the UK Government, to include the potential for a statutory definition of Child Criminal Exploitation.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should set out its views on the benefits or otherwise of a national strategy to respond to Child Criminal Exploitation in light of the concerns raised in this report about inconsistency of practice across Wales

Response: Accept in principle

We do not consider the development of a national strategy essential to achieve greater consistency in practice. However, we will reflect on this matter and share our views with the Committee. We will continue to engage with our partners in Wales and at the Home Office to discuss ways of improving the sharing and consistency of practice. We are planning a national workshop in March 2025 which will consider approaches and inform future work in Wales.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that

In its forthcoming legislation, the Welsh Government should:

- ensure that care experienced children and young people who are, or who are at risk of becoming, homeless retain a legal priority in relation to other categories of homeless applicant; and
- create a mandatory 'reasonable preference' category for people who are care experienced (regardless of homelessness status) in local authorities' social housing allocation schemes

Response: Accept.

The Welsh Government published a White Paper on ending homelessness in October 2023 and an analysis of responses received to that consultation in April 2024. A Bill is

now in development. We are committed to ensuring the needs of care leavers are prioritised in that work and our officials will continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure the legislation aligns with our corporate parenting aims.

Homelessness services in Wales were over-hauled with all stakeholders during our response to Covid 19. We have sustained this work and practice through the introduction of the 11th category of priority need in 2022 and the future Bill will endeavour to secure this approach.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that

If the Welsh Government is not willing to keep priority need status for care experienced young people, it should carry out and publish within 6 months of the publication of this report a robust assessment of the impacts of removing priority need status on care experienced people

Response: Accept (subject to discussion about timescale).

The abolition of the priority need test is a key facet of the finely calibrated package of reforms put forward within the White Paper on ending homelessness in Wales. Its removal will create a more universal system which delivers our aims of providing person-centred practice that is trauma informed and will end a system which is currently based on exclusion. The proposed legislation will be subject to a range of Impact Assessments which will be published alongside the Bill.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should review the Single Unified Safeguarding Review governance arrangements to ensure that the process:

- includes a clear, efficient and transparent mechanism by which report recommendations are immediately disseminated to every single relevant individual agency across the whole of Wales to implement.
- clearly states whose responsibility it is to make sure that each relevant individual agency is made aware of what they need to do to implement the recommendations.
- clearly states whose responsibility it is to make sure that recommendation is implemented; and
- clearly states what enforcement action will be taken if recommendations are not implemented, who will take that enforcement action, and when and how it will be taken.

Response: Accept.

The Committee's recommendations have been taken forward as part of development of the Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) in Wales. The SUSR is a new process and was launched in October 2024. A key role of the SUSR is to strengthen accountability around the implementation of recommendations and action plans.

We are working with Regional Safeguarding Boards, the National Independent Safeguarding Board and Manchester City Metropolitan University to provide clearer guidance on identifying and implementing learning, and clarity of recommendations and actions.

The work will be embedded in the SUSR training programme and resources for chairs, reviewers and panel members so that learning from reviews can be implemented as quickly and effectively as possible.

To support SUSR Statutory Guidance delivery, we have:

- established a transparent governance structure (the SUSR Support Network) and an internal SUSR Tasking and Co-ordination Group with relevant policy leads to enable recommendations to be efficiently disseminated to relevant agencies.
- established the SUSR Co-ordination Hub, who are managing a tracker of national recommendations and actions coming from reviews, which states responsibility, monitors delivery and will be used to escalate issues up to the SUSR Ministerial Board level when required; and
- developed a SUSR Dashboard which is undergoing testing and will be available to all relevant external partners to transparently monitor SUSR activity across Wales.

We propose to undertake a review at the one-year stage.

Terms of Reference for the first-year review of the SUSR Statutory Guidance are being drafted and will include analysis of governance arrangements. The Terms of Reference will be considered by the Welsh Government SUSR Strategy Group who will oversee the process.

It is anticipated that enforcement action would only arise if all checks and balances failed through use of the SUSR Support Network. Relevant Inspectorates would be notified, and it would be for them to consider what further action may be required, for example a statutory notice of enforcement action.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that

For each of the six Regional Safeguarding Boards and the National Independent Safeguarding Board, the Welsh Government should publish for the 2023-24 financial year:

- actual meeting dates.
- records of which agencies/organisations attended each meeting; and
- meeting agendas and minutes, including actions agreed (redacted as appropriate)

Response: Reject.

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 requires the National Independent Safeguarding Board to make an annual report to the Welsh Ministers. This report must outline the activities undertaken by the NISB, an assessment of the effectiveness of arrangements to safeguard children and adults in Wales and provide recommendations for improving safeguarding practice. The National Independent Safeguarding Board (Wales) (No. 2) Regulations 2015 also stipulate the Board should keep minutes of its meetings (Regulation 4 (5)) and that its annual report should be made publicly available

(Regulation 8 (3)). Regulation 5 (7) of the Safeguarding Boards (Functions and Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2015 stipulates that Safeguarding Boards must keep minutes of their meetings.

Beyond these requirements there is no legal requirement for the National Independent Safeguarding Board or the Regional Safeguarding Boards to publish the minutes, or other details, of their meetings.

The Committee's recommendation would duplicate existing regulations.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its assessment of the effectiveness of the six Regional Safeguarding Boards and the National Independent Safeguarding Board in bring together local and national partners across statutory and non-statutory agencies, devolved and otherwise, to deliver tangible improvements in safeguarding practice.

Response: Accept in principle.

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 the duties of the National Independent Safeguarding Board are to provide support and advice to the Regional Safeguarding Boards to ensure their effectiveness, to report on the adequacy of safeguarding arrangements and to make recommendations regarding improvements to Welsh Ministers. Regulations require members of the National Independent Safeguarding Board to meet the Chairs of the Regional Safeguarding Boards at least twice a year to inform their work.

Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSB) provide an annual report to the National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB). These are considered by the NISB and inform their future work plan as well as members providing feedback to individual RSBs on their annual reports and work plans. Members of the NISB sit on RSBs across Wales and this provides a level of consistency for relationships.

The NISB makes an annual report to Welsh Ministers and must make any other report as requested by them. The Chair of the NISB meets the Minister for Children and Social Care twice a year to discuss themes arising from its work and from the work of the RSBs.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should work alongside statutory and non-statutory partners, drawing on existing work such as Cardiff University's Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit, to develop a set of resources and training materials to improve frontline professionals' awareness of, and response to, criminal exploitation and the other forms of marginalisation explored in this report. These resources and materials should be targeted at professionals working in a range of settings that have direct contact with vulnerable children (such as social services, housing departments, education establishments, health boards, etc.). The Welsh Government should take steps

to ensure that relevant frontline professionals across the statutory sector – including those employed by organisations commissioned by the statutory sector, such as charities - receive that training

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government will continue to work alongside statutory and non-statutory partners, including the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board and Regional Safeguarding Boards, to draw on existing work such as Cardiff University's Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit to support practice developments.

The Welsh Government is developing online learning on modern slavery. The content of the online learning has been reviewed by members of the Anti-Slavery Wales Training and Awareness Group. The online learning includes content on Child Criminal Exploitation and highlights the Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit.

Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSB) and Social Care Workforce teams in local authorities, commission and/or deliver multi-agency training on a range of safeguarding topics including sexual and criminal exploitation.

The Welsh Government provides funding of £12,000 annually to each RSB to contribute to their multi-agency safeguarding training programmes and an additional £2,000 annually for the RSBs to deliver a range of activities in National Safeguarding Week (usually held in the third week of November).

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should work alongside health boards, police forces and other relevant statutory and non-statutory agencies to develop a pan-Wales child criminal exploitation risk assessment tool for use by frontline staff, including in healthcare settings. The rollout of the risk assessment tool should be accompanied by the programme of training and awareness raising that we advocate in Recommendation 11

Response: Reject.

We consider existing mechanisms to be fit for purpose and therefore developing an additional tool is not necessary. As outlined in our response to recommendation 11, the Welsh Government will work with the Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board and Regional Safeguarding Boards on increasing awareness of the Complex Safeguarding Wales Practitioner Toolkit through revising the All-Wales Practice Guide on Safeguarding Children from Child Criminal Exploitation. We are also developing online learning on modern slavery. This includes content on Child Criminal Exploitation.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should explore the feasibility of a Wales-wide safeguarding information sharing platform, such as the West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board tracker, to improve information sharing across Wales

Response: Accept.

The Welsh Government will continue to work with key partners to explore the safeguarding information sharing platforms being utilised across Wales. Across the multi-agency safeguarding landscape there are a range of partners with varying information systems and needs that require careful consideration.

The Welsh Government is sighted on the work being undertaken across Wales including the West Glamorgan Safeguarding Board Tracker, and the Single View of a Child work that Cardiff Council and the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board have been developing. We look forward to understanding the journey of these areas of work and the outcomes achieved following their pilot phases.

Welsh Government officials are also working with stakeholders on progressing the ambition around Connecting Care, which would include the potential for a shared care record. The Connecting Care programme will incorporate the benefits of cloud-based technology, making it easier to connect systems and platforms going forward.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that

In its response to our report, the Welsh Government should set out in detail its understanding of the impact of data protection legislation on multi-agency working in relation to safeguarding vulnerable children to help both statutory and non-statutory bodies understand their data protection obligations when working together to support marginalised children and their families

Response: Accept.

Information sharing is key to good safeguarding practice and relevant partners have a duty to report children at risk under Part 7 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. Professionals must share information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. While GDPR gives people the right to be informed as to how their personal information is being used, it also allows for information to be shared without their consent if there is a lawful basis to do so.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has published [A 10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children | ICO](#). This helpful guide has a clear message that data protection legislation does not prevent individuals sharing information to safeguard children. The ICO has made a promise that people will not get into trouble if they share information to protect children and young people at risk of serious harm¹ and has published resources to be used to 'myth bust' misconceptions with regard to the sharing of information, under the banner 'Think. Check. Share.'²

The Wales Safeguarding Procedures include 'pointers for practice' which provide guidance based on the latest research and practice developments. This includes [Seven golden rules for information sharing](#). In brief these comprise: GDPR and the Data Protection Act provide a framework for sharing information, the importance of seeking

¹ [ICO work to promote sharing data to safeguard children - Hwb](#)

² [Sharing information to safeguard children: Marketing materials | ICO](#)

consent to share information where safe to do so, the importance of seeking advice and that it is possible to share information without consent where lawful to do so. Decisions to share information in such circumstances must be based on the safety and well-being of people and must be proportionate, relevant and timely and decision-making should be recorded.

The All-Wales Practice guide ‘Safeguarding children who go missing from home or care’³ confirms the importance of information sharing to prevent abuse or serious harm to others and confirms that it is not the intention of data protection legislation to be used as a reason not to do so.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should provide an update on the long-term future of the Wales Police Schools Programme, outlining what, if any, centrally funded provision will replace this vital initiative

Response: Accept.

The priority for the budget in 2024-2025 was to protect funding for frontline public services. The Cabinet was faced with a series of very difficult decisions and as it developed the budget, it considered whether to continue funding non-devolved areas where we have traditionally stepped in to provide funding in the absence of support from the previous UK Government.

The match funding for the programme was provided by the four police forces. We understand the police are currently considering their involvement in schools. The Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed Powys has agreed to fund a police schools programme, and each police force will consider their approach. There is no central funding planned for a similar initiative.

Welsh Government officials are liaising with Public Health Wales, which is co-producing a toolkit to support schools to design and develop their Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience through identified high-priority health and well-being topics. Welsh Government officials will be working with a range of internal and external stakeholders to examine what existing or alternative provision and resources are available to ensure children are have information to allow them to make informed decisions and keep them safe.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out its views on the merits or otherwise of specialist teams within social services departments that work with children who go missing, and/are sexually and/or criminally exploited.

Response: Accept.

³ [Safeguarding Wales](#)

We recognise and accept the merits of specialist teams as being effective in meeting the needs of children who go missing and are being sexually and/or criminally exploited or who are at risk of being exploited.

We also recognise that there are examples of exceptional practice in some areas in Wales where specialist teams are part of the social services departments. For example, the Safeguarding Adolescents from Exploitation (SAFE) team in Cardiff. Equally, there are benefits to commissioning arrangements that have been developed within regions and local authorities to contract specialist services such as Barnardo's as required.

Key stakeholders have told us they consider that having a specialist team is important, however, they have indicated that all practitioners who have contact with children must have the knowledge and skills to deal with any safeguarding issues that arise, including being able to respond to children who go missing and/or who have been exploited.

Key pieces of research highlight how specialist teams can play a critical role in tackling issues such as sexual and criminal exploitation due to the specialist knowledge held within the teams. Safeguarding issues such as exploitation do not exist in isolation. They are primarily the result of adverse childhood experiences that create vulnerabilities. We will continue to be vigilant in dealing with the issues presented to children, however, will proceed with some caution as there may be the potential that when dealing with issues in isolation may lead to an intense focus on one issue to the exclusion of other important vulnerability factors. Consideration will be given to a more integrated and holistic approach to address the complex nature of child exploitation.

Prevention activity can play a crucial broader role in enabling children to thrive and to help direct them towards fulfilling.

There is a variation across local authorities of the demand they experience therefore this requires local/regional determination that is based on a comprehensive needs assessment.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should update exclusion guidance for schools to reflect the wider risk factors of exploitation, as explored in this report, and ensure all schools are reminded of the potential consequences of exclusion and part-time timetables. Concurrently, the Welsh Government should work with local authorities to develop a bank of examples of where schools have successfully supported vulnerable children to remain in school, sharing those case studies to inform best practice across the sector

Response: Accept.

We have established an exclusions advisory group to support us in undertaking a comprehensive review and re-development of the Exclusion from Schools and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) guidance. The wider risk factors of exploitation, including reminding schools about the potential consequences of exclusion and part-time timetables, will be considered as part of this work.

We have invited local authorities to participate in the advisory group, and available case studies will be collected as part of this work.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should explore and report back to us within six months on the use of the children missing education database for local authorities to identify and safeguard children who are not in education settings and who may, consequently, be at risk of exploitation

Response: Accept (subject to agreement regarding timescales within this recommendation).

The children missing education (CME) database regulations will be piloted from March 2025 until March 2026 with seven local authorities. A formal evaluation of the arrangements will be undertaken alongside the pilot, to determine the effectiveness of the arrangements in identifying children who are CME, and who consequently could be at risk. Once the evaluation of the pilot has concluded the report will be published on the Welsh Government website and will be made available to the Committee. The evaluation will be commissioned externally and a date for the submission of the report will be agreed with the contractor once this contract has been awarded.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, and having reflected on the impact (or otherwise) of the voluntary Corporate Parenting Charter on the quality and consistency of services for care experienced children and young people, the Welsh Government should set out:

- what consideration it has given to placing its Corporate Parenting Charter on a statutory footing; and
- any further action it intends to take in relation to corporate parenting, and the timelines for doing so

Response: Accept.

We want everyone to have a shared responsibility for corporate parenting across public sector bodies, private sector and the third sector. This incorporates health, education, housing and other bodies that all have a part to contribute to ensure care experienced children and young people flourish and thrive.

The Corporate Parenting Charter has been published on a voluntary basis in order to promote and introduce the Charter and the principles of corporate parenting to organisations beyond local authorities and to facilitate discussions on what they can deliver.

We intend to use the Charter to make real qualitative change for care-experienced children and young people. We want all organisations to truly understand corporate parenting, embrace and embed it, and provide the support needed by care-experienced children and young people to have the same life chances as other young people in Wales.

We intend to strengthen the guidance for local authorities through a dedicated chapter on Corporate Parenting within the Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked after and accommodated children) under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014. The chapter will set out local authorities' duties in their role as corporate parents and support a strengthened strategic approach to corporate parenting and will be completed before the end of this Senedd term.

We are continuing to explore existing legislative levers to support the Charter and create a consistent approach to corporate parenting in Wales.

All organisations who have signed up to the Charter have received a welcome letter from the First Minister, the Corporate Parent Wales badge and a pledge template to complete. My officials will continue to work with our Corporate Parenting Implementation Group and care-experienced young people will a central role in reviewing the templates and providing feedback on the pledges.

We will be holding our first best practice event for corporate parents in early 2025.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out:

- what support it has provided to local authorities to help them drive/adopt digital innovations that improve communication with children in care; and
- whether it considers that the app used in Denbighshire (or similar platforms used elsewhere) might warrant further investigation, with a view to rolling them out across local authorities nationwide

Response: Accept.

The Social Services Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Part 6 Code Practice for Looked After and Accommodated Children, lays out how local authorities should use a range of communication methods - for example, email, phone and text message when in contact with children in care.

The “Big Welcome” is a new web-based bilingual tool launched by Foster Wales and rolled out across all local authorities in Wales last year. It was developed in response to feedback from children in care to fostering services who identified what information they would find helpful such as knowing where they were going to live whilst in foster care.

Through the Big Welcome tool, foster carers can access their profiles and include information about themselves, their family and their home including photographs, to help welcome the child/young person into their home. This helps to reassure, ease anxieties and can help the transition for the child/young person when moving to a new foster carer or coming into care for the first time. As it is web based the information is readily available which is especially useful in emergency placement situations.

We will continue to support local authorities to pioneer the use of innovative technology such as Denbighshire’s use of “Mind of My Own” and we will look to identify and share best practice of such apps across Wales.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that

In its response to this report, the Welsh Government should set out clearly what progress it has made in establishing a National Guardianship Service for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and how and by when that work will progress.

Response: Accept

Under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) have the same rights and entitlements as looked after children who are born in Wales and the UK, regardless of their immigration status. They are included in any policy or service that is implemented to support children looked after; this includes access to health, and education services.

Welsh Government officials have met Scottish Government officials to gain an understanding of the Scottish Guardianship model including its scope, funding mechanism, and support components.

There are differences between the legislation in Wales and Scotland. Legislation in Wales provides a statutory entitlement to independent advocacy support for all children and young people in care, and a personal advisor for all young people when they turn 16. These duties are not replicated in Scottish legislation. Instead, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 provides that Scottish Ministers are under a duty to provide a guardian for every eligible child, and that relevant authorities will be under a duty to refer any eligible child to a guardian.

My officials have also met representatives of the Children's Legal Centre Wales, the Children's Society, the Bevan Foundation and the British Red Cross to discuss their joint briefing relating to the introduction of a Guardianship scheme in Wales. Welsh Government officials have requested that further consideration is given to the statutory entitlements already on offer for UASC in Wales and how a Guardianship Scheme could add value to these. A further paper is in the process of being developed and will be submitted to Welsh Government during the early part of 2025.

Alongside the Wales Strategic Migration Partnership, my officials held a workshop with all local authorities in Wales to gain an understanding of the various support that is being provided to UASC as part of their statutory responsibilities, alongside additional support that is being offered to this cohort.

We will undertake a more detailed mapping exercise of the services currently on offer through our statutory provision, determine the gaps in support available to UASC, alongside considering the additionality that aspects of a Guardianship Scheme could provide. This will be used to inform the nature of any Scheme in the future.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should take immediate action to better understand the nature and scale of exploitation of neurodivergent children and children with learning

disabilities, with a view to working alongside relevant agencies to develop a more effective response to safeguarding these groups of children.

Response: Accept in principle.

We agree the importance of data to enable us to better understand the experience of different groups of people to provide evidence to inform policy and delivery. We recognise there are gaps in the availability of robust and reliable data and that further work is required in conjunction with the UK Government, police, and others to support the development of more sophisticated data.

We recognise there is substantial evidence highlighting that children and young people with additional learning needs are at increased risk of being exploited. My officials will work to raise awareness of these risks amongst practitioners in the sector.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should acknowledge:

- the fundamental and inherent links between poverty and the abuse and exploitation of children;
- that, despite the most powerful levers for addressing poverty lying elsewhere, it does have powers to provide support and to safeguard children who are made vulnerable as a result of poverty and should rightly be held to account for its successes and failures in doing so.

Response: Accept.

We know that parents living in poverty do an amazing job of caring for their children despite the challenges which they face daily. It is important not to imply that all children living in poverty will be experiencing abuse or neglect. However, there is a substantial evidence base regarding the impact poverty has on children and how living in poverty can increase the risk of experiencing abuse, neglect and other harms. Children who live in poverty are likely to have one or more Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Our Child Poverty Strategy acknowledges the evidence on links between poverty and risk of child abuse and neglect, reflecting the relationship between issues like domestic abuse, poor mental health and substance misuse, increased risk of harm to children and increased risk of family poverty. The Strategy sets out our ambitions for the longer term and outlines how we will work across Government and with our partners to maximise the impact of the levers available to us, including our convening powers. It provides a framework through which we can deliver policies and programmes that support the outcomes we want for our children and young people now and in the future.

Services need to work together to safeguard children, empower families and communities through both early intervention and to support them to deal with issues when they are at crisis point. Objective 5 in the strategy specifically targets collaboration with partners stating we will ensure that effective cross-government working at the national level enables strong collaboration at the regional and local level.

Our Child Poverty Strategy includes an objective to support child and family wellbeing and make sure that work across the Welsh Government delivers for children living in poverty and the priority to build communities with accessible, joined up services to meet community needs.

Agenda Item 6.3

Buffy Williams MS
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Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN



29th January 2025

Welsh Government's response to 'Children and Young People on the Margins' inquiry recommendations

Dear Buffy Williams MS,

On behalf of NYAS Cymru, I would like to sincerely thank you and the Children, Young People and Education's Committee for your ongoing work and final report recommendations on the 'Children and Young People on the Margins' inquiry.

Last week, Welsh Government responded to the Committee's final report recommendations. While we were initially pleased to see that Welsh Government accepted 15 recommendations and a further six in principle, we ultimately do not believe that these have been truly accepted by Welsh Government, nor do we believe Welsh Government's response clearly outlines what next steps they will be taking to action the recommendations they have accepted.

NYAS Cymru were delighted with the recommendations made by the Committee, so we are disappointed that Welsh Government have not used these to make transformative legislative changes to improve responses to missing children and children at risk of exploitation in Wales. We are disappointed that Welsh Government have not decided to introduce legislation to provide children and young people with a statutory right to the offer on a return home interview after returning to home or care following a missing episode. We believe this is a missed opportunity to ensure a strong and robust safeguarding response to missing episodes in Wales, as well as a missed opportunity to give children and young people in vulnerable situations another way of having their voices heard by professionals.

As you are aware, NYAS Cymru chairs the 'All Wales Missing the Point' Steering Group. The group will be meeting next week to discuss Welsh Government's response to the recommendations and produce a policy briefing ahead of the Plenary debate on Wednesday 19th February. NYAS Cymru would be pleased to share this briefing with the Committee and put forward questions for Committee members during this Plenary debate.

Once again, we would like to thank you and the Committee for truly listening to our calls, the day-to-day experiences of our frontline workers and most importantly, the children and young people we support. Please do not hesitate to reach out if there is anything we can do to support the Committee ahead of the Plenary debate.

Best regards,

Sharon Lovell MBE, Chief Executive, NYAS Cymru

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Agenda Item 6.4

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol

Equality and Social Justice Committee

Buffy Williams MS

Chair of the Children, Young People and Education Committee

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January 28th 2025

Dear Buffy,

Child Poverty Strategy Monitoring Framework

On Monday, 10 February the Equality and Social Justice Committee will receive a technical briefing on the Welsh Government's Child Poverty Strategy monitoring framework from officials in a private session.

We will also hear from Professor Rod Hick in a public session. The sessions will be in hybrid format commencing at 13:30 and draw to a close around 15:00. Given your remit and longstanding commitment to these issues, we would like to invite you or a representative of the Committee to attend the sessions under Standing Order 17.49.

If this would be of interest to you or any of your Members, I would be grateful if you could please confirm by Wednesday 5th February if possible so that practical arrangements can be made.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Jenny Rathbone MS

Chair, Equality and Social Justice Committee

Agenda Item 6.5

Buffy Williams
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Treorchy
RCT
CF42 6AH

The Fostering Network
15 Neptune Court
Vanguard Way
Cardiff
CF24 5PJ

Wednesday 29th January 2025

Dear Buffy Williams MS,

As the Chair of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee, we would like to invite you to sponsor and speak at our event in the Pierhead on Tuesday 20th May 12-1:30pm to celebrate this year's Foster Care Fortnight. The theme this year is 'The Power of Relationships', so the event will focus on celebrating the work already taking place across Wales and encouraging collaboration across the sector to make foster care the best it can be. We are hoping to have a panel discussion, led by young people, which we would be grateful if you could be part of to talk about the Committee's priorities? We would be happy to set up a meeting to discuss this further, or send a more detailed briefing closer to the event.

We also wanted to take this opportunity to highlight The Fostering Network's current campaign priorities in Wales and would be grateful if you could take these to the Committee so we can work together to achieve them.

1. Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill

As you know the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill is currently making its way through the Senedd. We are supportive of the Bill, in principle but have been working with other third sector organisations to put forward some amendments. We are concerned about the transitional period and want to ensure that we do not end up losing more foster carers, as we are already facing a shortage. As part of the Bill, we have also been asking the Government to communicate with foster carers about the plans and how this will affect them. We are still waiting for this communication to be completed and shared. It is important that this happens soon so that foster carers are informed and able to provide information and support to the children and young people in their care. We would ask that the Committee continues to monitor the Bill and ensure that it will work well in practice, so that children and young people's lives are not disrupted, and we do not lose foster carers in the process.



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2. Allowances for foster carers

All foster carers receive an allowance to care for the children in their care. Each year, we publish recommended rates for these allowances that cover the full cost of caring for a child based on extensive analysis with economists. The current National Minimum Allowance in Wales is much lower than this in all age categories despite multiple commitments from the previous administration to review these in line with our recommended rates. We understand the final report of the review fostering allowances conducted by Foster Wales is currently being reviewed by Welsh Government. In order to recruit and retain foster carers, and care for children and young people properly, we hope you will be able to join us in campaigning for foster carer allowances to be increased in line with our recommended rates.

3. Fees for foster carers

Fee payments should be made on top of allowances to recognise a foster carers' time, skills and experience. While all foster carers receive an allowance, there is no requirement for fee payments to be made. As a result, only around 50 per cent of foster carers (UK-wide) receive a fee or 'reward' element for the work that they do caring for children, and the amount varies hugely. Usually fee-paid carers receive payment only when they have a child in placement. We are calling for all foster carers to be paid a fair fee that is clearly separated from the allowance amount and would appreciate the Committees support in this. We can provide a more detailed briefing on both fees and allowances, should you require it.

4. National register for foster carers

We have been working to take forward the Welsh Government commitment in summer 2023 to scope out the recommendation from the Radical Reform Inquiry to create a national register for foster carers. It has again been committed to being explored within the amendment stages of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Bill, though it has been made clear that this will not be part of the Bill. A register would address the need to increase the status of foster carers in the team around the child; the difficulty of foster carers moving from one service to another; and the need for more robust safeguarding measures in the fostering sector. We hope, as a Committee, you will recognise the importance of this commitment and take forward this recommendation urgently.

5. Post-18 care

We believe that all young people in foster care should have the opportunity to remain living with their carers after the age of 18 in order to make a smooth and supported transition into adulthood. However, we hear from foster carers and young people in foster care that the 'When I am Ready' scheme it is not working as it should for either of them . We are calling on the new Government to honour the

commitment to review 'When I am Ready' in line with the Radical Reform Inquiry recommendation to remove the financial and operational barriers to this scheme, and would appreciate your support in this.

6. Fostering Wellbeing

We also wanted to draw your attention to one of our current programmes, which we will be showcasing at our event in May. Since 2019 we have been delivering Fostering Wellbeing across Wales, a multi-disciplinary programme bringing together all the professionals involved in supporting children who are looked after, including foster carers. Fostering Wellbeing encourages professionals to work together, with a focus on improving wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. We work in partnership with Foster Wales to recruit foster carers as 'pioneers', experienced foster carers who receive training and support to become peer mentors and leaders of good practice within their service. Rhondda Cynon Taf, our partner for the local authority pilot of Fostering Wellbeing from 2017-2019, has our most active and engaged Pioneer group, and is our model for good practice as we develop the Pioneer network across Wales.

Thank you for considering these critical issues for children in foster care. We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss how we can continue to collaborate to improve foster care for children, young people, and foster carers in Wales, and to discuss our upcoming event.

Edrychaf ymlaen at glywed gennych,

Yr eiddoch yn gywir,

Elizabeth Bryan,

Assistant Director, Wales

Agenda Item 6.6

Dear Chair and Committee Clerks,

I am writing to share with you a new report from the Royal Society of Chemistry that will hopefully be of interest to the work of the Children, Young People, and Education Committee.

The "[Future Workforce and Educational Pathways](#)" report has been two years in development and sets out clearly defined recommendations for developing skills to support the sector across school, further and higher education, and throughout careers, to ensure the chemical sciences can reach their potential and deliver growth for the Welsh and wider UK economy.

Chemistry represents an area of strong growth for Wales and the UK, with jobs in the sector expected to grow by 6.5% over the next decade – which means outstripping the wider economy by 30%. However, these growth projections could well be undermined if there are not the skilled individuals to fill these new jobs.

That means reassessing the current chemistry employment ecosystem, from school curriculums to the options available in further and higher education, right up to continuous professional development for those in the workforce already. It also means placing greater emphasis on skills that employers want, such as green skills, digital skills and transferrable skills, as well as the technical knowledge one typically associates with the chemical sciences.

Our new report outlines recommendations and actions for policymakers nationally and locally, employers, education authorities, further and higher education institutions, and beyond, taking a holistic approach to tackling potential skills shortages and ensuring we all play our part in supporting the chemical sciences sector to be a key driver of the future economy.

The report is attached or can be found [here](#). We would welcome any opportunity to engage the Committee on the report, particularly as Wales continues its education reform journey.

Best wishes

Niall

Agenda Item 6.7

Dawn Bowden MS
Minister for Children and Social Care

By email

27 January 2025

Dear Minister,

We write on behalf of the Expert Advisory Group on Childcare (EAGC) to share our concerns regarding the childcare budget outlined in the Draft Budget and plans for Phase 3 of the Flying Start programme's childcare element.

First, we welcome the increase in the daily rate for childcare providers. This measure is vital for the sector's sustainability. The additional £20 million and the exemption of registered childcare providers from small business rates are much-needed steps to support the childcare sector.

However, we are deeply concerned about the limited additional funding allocated to childcare in this budget. As you have noted, the new funding primarily offsets the increase in daily provider rates, offering no substantial investment to address the systemic challenges facing childcare in Wales.

Moreover, the additional funding fails to recover the significant reductions the childcare budget has already endured. The £16.1 million redirection during the October 2023 in-year spending review and the subsequent £11.2 million cut in the 2024-25 budget represent a cumulative loss of [£27.3 million](#) over two years. This reduction stands in stark contrast to the [£128.4 million Barnett Consequentials](#) from increased childcare investment in England and the overall [£1.7 billion](#) uplift in the Welsh Government's budget.

We understand that the Welsh Government faces challenging decisions in allocating its budget and must carefully prioritise available resources. However, the additional funding allocated to childcare falls significantly short of addressing the substantial cuts the sector has endured and the critical need for investment to meet the growing demands of families and providers.

We had hoped that increased funding would reverse the previous cuts and signal renewed investment in childcare. However, the limited additional funding leaves uncertainty about the Welsh Government's commitment to tackling the childcare crisis in Wales.

Reports from various organisations consistently highlight how childcare in Wales remains unaffordable and inaccessible for many families.¹ Barriers to accessing childcare disproportionately impact low-income families and families with disabled children and children with additional needs, preventing parents from working and depriving children of critical early educational benefits, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty.

With more than half of children living in poverty in Wales belonging to families with a child aged 0 to 4, affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare is essential. It supports parents, particularly the second earner in couple households, to enter or remain in the workforce, thereby reducing poverty. Tackling child poverty is a stated priority of the Welsh Government, and childcare is a critical component of any effective child poverty strategy. Given that one of the key approaches of the child poverty strategy is to [“reduce costs and maximise the incomes of families”](#), childcare plays an even more critical role in effectively implementing the strategy, as it directly affects family finances while enabling parents to participate in the workforce.

Flying Start, as an anti-poverty strategy, has proven the Welsh Government’s commitment to addressing child poverty through early years investment. While the EAGC does not view Flying Start as a comprehensive solution for childcare, we support its expansion to all two-year-olds as a step in the right direction.

In your correspondence with the EAGC and in Senedd debates, you have reaffirmed the Welsh Government’s commitment to expanding Flying Start’s childcare element. Additionally, you noted that local authorities have been commissioned to prepare for this expansion. However, we remain unclear about the implementation of these plans, particularly in the absence of a dedicated budget. Your [statement](#) to the Children, Young People, and Education Committee highlighted the challenge of delivering without a confirmed budget, raising concerns that Phase 3 expansion of Flying Start may be delayed or suspended.

Therefore, we would like to ask you to provide clarity on the following:

1. How are local authorities expected to plan for the expansion of Flying Start without a clear budget allocation?
2. Does the absence of budgetary provision in the Draft Budget signal a suspension of Phase 3?

¹ [Little steps, big struggles: Childcare in Wales](#) (November 2023), [Tackling disadvantage through childcare in Wales](#) (January 2024), [Family Childcare Promise: The effects of introducing a cap on childcare costs for families with 0-4 year-old children in Wales](#) (July 2024); [Ending Poverty in Early Years](#) (December 2024)

3. How will the Welsh Government address the systemic challenges in the childcare sector, including ensuring that Flying Start's expansion supports families with disabled children and those with additional needs?

Evidence shows that childcare is central to reducing child poverty. In [your oral statement](#) of October 1, 2024, you emphasised the importance of a child's first 1,000 days and reaffirmed child poverty as a priority for the Welsh Government. With childcare consuming nearly half the income of the lowest-income families, decisive action is needed to meet the commitments of the child poverty strategy.

The EAGC would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns and explore ways we can support the Welsh Government in achieving its goals for childcare and poverty reduction.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter, and we look forward to your response.

In the interests of transparency, copies of this letter will also be sent to opposition party spokespeople, and we will be making it public in the next few days.

Kind regards,

Sarah Rees (Head of Oxfam Cymru) and Steffan Evans (Head of Policy (Poverty), Bevan Foundation) on behalf of the Expert Advisory Group on Childcare

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