

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg

This response was submitted to the Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms

IER 05

Ymateb gan: ColegauCymru

Response from: ColegauCymru

About ColegauCymru

ColegauCymru is a post-compulsory education charity; we promote the public benefit of post-compulsory education and learning. We also convene the Further Education (FE) Principals' Forum, which represents FE colleges and FE institutions (FEIs) in Wales. ColegauCymru also undertakes research, policy development and provides practical support to FE colleges in Wales, including on work-based learning (WBL) which is a key part of FE college activity.

ColegauCymru welcomes the opportunity to submit a consultation response to the Senedd's Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee on the implementation of education reforms. We have confined our comments to the most relevant areas for the post-16 sector.

1. The Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021

The associated reform of qualifications to align with the Curriculum for Wales.

1.1 ColegauCymru maintains a keen interest in the development of qualification reform and notes the ongoing work undertaken by Qualifications Wales on the new GCSEs, as well as the consultation expected on these in autumn 2022.

1.2 Throughout the process to date, ColegauCymru has emphasised that in addition to the qualifications being aligned to the new curriculum, it is vital that new qualifications enable a smooth transition to post-16 study, whether academic or vocational. Reform of the compulsory education curriculum in isolation carries the very real potential for a disconnection between this and post-16 systems. This must be avoided. Discussions with Qualifications Wales on this topic have been constructive and ongoing but it is essential that post-16 vocational and academic qualifications are part of the considerations when drawing up and finalising the content of new GCSEs.

1.3 In addition, given the focus on the Cymraeg 2050 target of a million Welsh speakers and other policy support for this, it is important to ensure that the new qualifications are developed, available and promoted in both Welsh and English. Exploration of how best to ensure that young people studying through the medium of Welsh are supported to continue in post-16 settings must be a consideration of arrangements for the new Curriculum for Wales.

1.4 The new GCSE qualifications need to be portable, well understood and well respected, not just across the rest of the UK, but also further afield.

1.5 The Committee might like to seek reassurance that in addition to ensuring that qualifications align with the Curriculum for Wales, qualification reform takes full and adequate account of

learner transition to post-16 study, including Welsh medium needs, and plans are in place to ensure portability and recognition.

2. The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018

Implementation of the new Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system and the effective transfer of learners from the existing Special Educational Needs (SEN) system.

2.1 ColegauCymru is extremely pleased with the improvements that ALN Transformation has supported for young people. While the process has taken a long time, this has actually supported a more thorough preparation. Although great progress has been made within the FE sector, the impact from Covid is still being felt and is likely to increase challenges during implementation.

2.2 The public misperception created by the 0-25 years focus within Transformation means that many parents still believe that young people who have ALN have an automatic right to stay in education until this age. This is likely to result in additional and unnecessary challenges being made unless the Welsh Government and other key stakeholders can correct this misunderstanding.

2.3 FEIs have prepared well for their new duties but there still remain questions over funding – the Further Education sector cannot be expected to absorb the additional costs incurred which could be significant.

The application of the definition of ALN, compared to presently for SEN, and whether there is any ‘raising of the bar’ on the ground for determining eligibility for provision.

2.4 Underpinning the ALN changes is the principle of ‘Inclusive Practice’. Like many schools, colleges have been developing and improving their ‘universal’ offer to learners to ensure that all have their needs met as far as practicable. This means that, based on the definition within the Code, only learners who require Additional Learning Provision will require an Individual Development Plan (IDP).

2.5 While this might be misconstrued as ‘a raising of the bar’, in practice, it actually means that colleges are working in an inclusive way to ensure young people are encouraged to be as independent as possible. This also allows resources to be focussed on those who need them most.

Other factors potentially affecting implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system, for example levels of funding and fall out from the pandemic.

2.6 As highlighted above, the impact of Covid is still being felt across the Further Education sector. It will be important to ensure that sufficient and flexible funding is available for successful implementation of these initiatives in the face of the challenge of the cost of living crisis and other pressures. Successful implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system cannot be achieved in isolation and must be set against the backdrop of the funding needed across the post-16 sector more broadly.

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