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Ymateb gan: Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

Response from: Y Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol

The Coleg Cymraeg's evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Thank you for the invitation to give evidence to the Committee regarding your [inquiry](#) into routes into post-16 education and training.

This briefing note summarises our main messages, and representatives from the Coleg Cymraeg (the Coleg) will be pleased to elaborate and answer questions during the oral evidence session on 13 March 2025.

The Coleg creates and promotes training and study opportunities in the Welsh language by working with further education colleges, schools, universities, apprenticeship providers and employers. We inspire and encourage everyone to use their Welsh language skills, with the aim of creating a bilingual workforce, including the education workforce itself. The Welsh Government has designated the Coleg to advise Medr (the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research) on its duties relating to the Welsh language.

Key messages

- The general lack of participation in tertiary education¹ is a cause for concern for the Coleg, and puts **increasing pressure on Welsh-medium and bilingual provision at all levels**.
- Ensuring **seamless Welsh-medium and bilingual progression routes** from statutory education to tertiary education, and within tertiary education, is essential in order to create the bilingual workforce of the future and achieve the targets of [Cymraeg 2050](#).
- The fact that Medr intends to develop a **National Plan for the Welsh language** in the tertiary sector is an important development, and an

¹ The term 'tertiary education' in this document covers post-16 education including further and higher education, adult community education, work based education, apprenticeships and local authority maintained school sixth forms

associated **fair funding model must be developed, to support all learners to follow Welsh-medium and bilingual routes.**

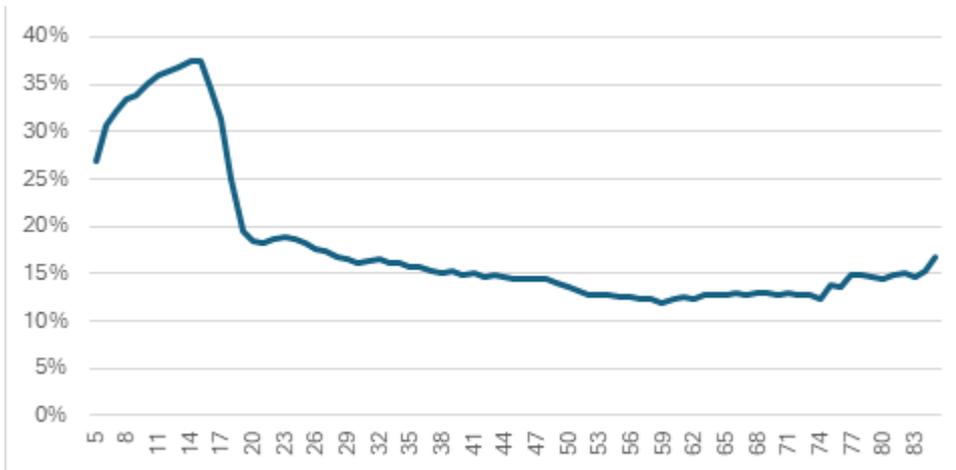
- The **lack of Welsh-medium teaching and assessment capacity** is hindering progress across the tertiary sector, and significant investment is needed to address this.
- There needs to be **better consistency in the data** that is collected and reported across the tertiary education sector to enable evidence-based planning of growth in Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.

Although progression rates from the Welsh-medium and bilingual statutory period are slightly higher than the average² not every learner has accessible and equal access to Welsh-medium provision. This is true even though good work has been done to develop opportunities to study a wide range of subjects through the medium of Welsh, with a significant increase in the numbers studying through the medium of Welsh or bilingually in the tertiary sector since the Coleg was established.

As a backdrop to all this, the 2021 census data shows a significant drop in the percentage of individuals who can speak Welsh at the end of the statutory education period. The data therefore suggests that the bridge between the statutory sector and the world of work – the tertiary sector – is underachieving.

² 'Learner' and 'learners' in this document include all those receiving tertiary education. This reflects the language used in the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 in relation to the Engagement Code.

Figure 1: Census 2021 data – Speaking Welsh by age



Medr has a statutory [strategic duty](#) to promote, encourage and meet the demand for Welsh-medium education in the tertiary sector. In response to an [advice note](#) from the Coleg, Medr has committed in its first Strategic Plan to [develop a National Plan](#) for the Welsh language across the tertiary education sector, which is an important step.

The next section responds to the specific questions included in the consultation:

The 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)

This is the Coleg's general response under the above heading (questions 1-6).

At a fundamental level, there is a lack of fully objective, impartial advice available to learners about post-16 Welsh-medium routes at all levels. Learners receive information from a number of sources, and the messages can be inconsistent and confusing.

The current post-16 education funding formulas encourage competition rather than collaboration, and this can lead to promotion activity that prioritises the interests of individual providers rather than the interests of the learner. This is referred to in [Estyn's review of the 16-19 curriculum \(2022\)](#): *'These competitive pressures are cited by many leaders, both in schools with sixth forms and in*

colleges, as having a significant impact on the range and extent of information, advice and guidance activities that is made available to learners. Financial concerns about budgets and local issues relating to surplus school places and provider performance against learner number targets often add to these pressures.' (p.34)

As part of a project commissioned recently by the Coleg to develop a behaviour change pack to encourage learners to study through the medium of Welsh or bilingually, a strong suggestion has been made that tailored information and personal contact are key in supporting learners to make decisions about their studies. In the higher education sector specifically, the Coleg is piloting a champions project that tries to encourage students to choose to study part of their course in Welsh. This could be a potential model for the whole of the post-16 sector in the future.

The Coleg engages with learners in the post-16 sector mainly through school visits, ambassador schemes, newsletters, resources and transition activities, and promotes the benefits of studying through the medium of Welsh. The results of a recent survey carried out by the Coleg (that received over 500 responses from sixth form learners) suggest that learners have a good understanding of the benefits of using their Welsh after leaving school (90%); nevertheless, only 32% considered studying part of their university course through the medium of Welsh. This suggests that learners need further information and support to address some concerns or doubts that they have about studying in Welsh at a higher level.

The findings of a recent research project sponsored by the Coleg, which was led by Dr Rebecca Ward from the University of South Wales, show that students who study through the medium of Welsh receive better results compared to students who only study through the medium of English. It would be useful to draw attention to these facts when discussing options with learners in the tertiary sector.

How effective careers support is at compulsory school age

We have no evidence to report under this section.

Changes in routes post-18

<p>9. Is there evidence that learners are changing their choices post-18, including a drop in Higher Education enrolments, and if so why?</p>	<p>UCAS data (2023) that was commissioned by the Coleg shows that the number of unique applicants from Welsh-medium and bilingual schools and the number of admissions among this cohort between 2018 and 2023 were at their lowest in 2023.</p> <p>This data also suggests that learners from Welsh-medium and bilingual schools who receive higher grades (ABB+) are more likely to be admitted to study at a higher education institution outside Wales than their peers. Only 39% of ABB+ applicants from Welsh-medium and bilingual schools were admitted³ by providers in Wales in 2023.</p> <p>Graduate Destination data also suggests that Welsh students who choose to study outside Wales are less likely to work in Wales after they graduate, than Welsh students who study at a higher education institution in Wales, making the outward migration described above even more concerning. As a result, we suggest that the Seren Academy's outcomes should be reviewed with more emphasis placed on promoting top-quality Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.</p> <p>Specific challenges face some subject areas where numbers have shrunk, often reflecting A-level trends</p>
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³ Admitted = an applicant who, at the end of the UCAS application cycle, has been placed for entry to higher education

	<p>and patterns. This includes areas such as Geography, Religious Studies, Music, Modern Languages and Welsh as a subject. This is a matter of considerable concern in a period of financial austerity within the higher education sector in Wales and with a funding model that puts subjects with relatively low numbers at a disadvantage.</p> <p>The London Economics Wales report for the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales in 2023 highlighted the fact that higher costs are associated with courses where a relatively low number of learners follow Welsh-medium or bilingual provision. The same is true across the tertiary sector. Funding models need to reflect this in order to enable the maintenance and development of suitable progression routes for all.</p> <p>The Coleg is very concerned about the drop in the numbers studying Welsh as an A-level and AS subject. The Coleg has called on the Government to ensure that the factors that are contributing to the drop, including the sustainability of the provision due to low numbers, can be addressed through the National Framework for Welsh Language Education that is proposed in the Welsh Language and Education Bill.</p>
<p>Welsh-medium provision</p>	
<p>10. The availability of post-16 options (both academic and</p>	<p>Since the Coleg was established, Welsh-medium provision in the higher education sector, and the breadth of this provision, has seen a significant</p>

<p>vocational) through the medium of Welsh, and how this impacts on young people's choices.</p>	<p>increase, and it is now possible to study a substantial amount of almost every subject through the medium of Welsh somewhere in Wales. However, many Welsh-speaking students are still not following Welsh-medium provision, for a number of reasons, including the unavailability of Welsh-medium provision at their particular institution, and a lack of confidence in their own Welsh language skills.</p> <p>Since the Coleg's responsibilities were extended to further education and apprenticeships in 2019, the number of learners who study part of their course bilingually (B1⁴) has increased significantly. However, the number of learners who study their course wholly in Welsh or very extensively in Welsh (C1 / B1) has not changed significantly. The Coleg has recognised the need to address this when reviewing its strategy.</p> <p>The school sector has the most extensive Welsh-medium provision at post-16 level, and Welsh speakers who follow sixth form provision are most likely to go on to study through the medium of Welsh at a higher education institution. But the sixth form sector is facing financial pressures and challenges arising from the need to maintain smaller classes. Higher education institutions also report that a</p>
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⁴ [recording-of-welsh-medium-learning-on-the-llwr-for-further-education.pdf](#)

significant number of learners who have studied at Welsh-medium and bilingual schools are reluctant to study through the medium of Welsh at university, especially if they have undertaken their A-level qualifications through the medium of English.

The [Welsh Language Commissioner's report on post-compulsory Education and the Welsh language: the learners' voice \(2023\)](#) supports these messages and highlights *'differences between school and college learners, in terms of their perception of their ability in Welsh, the language medium of their education and their attitudes as regards the importance of the Welsh language'*, and states that *'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'*.

Teaching and assessment capacity is an issue that is hindering progress across all sectors, and significant investment is needed to increase staffing capacity in order to be able to offer more Welsh-medium and bilingual provision.

These challenges need to be addressed in order to ensure that learners at all levels have access to and

encouragement to follow Welsh-medium provision, so that they continue to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills during their time in the post-16 sector, to prepare them to join a bilingual workforce.

If we look at the participation of learners who have studied at Welsh-medium and bilingual schools to GCSE level: of the pupils who were in year 11 in 2018/19, only 20% went on to study at a higher education institution in Wales⁵.

Only 3% of the students who studied at a Welsh-medium or bilingual school to GCSE age (in 2020/21) went on to follow an apprenticeship route with at least one bilingual learning activity in 2021/22⁶. And 8% of the learners who studied at a Welsh-medium or bilingual school to GCSE level in 2020/21 did not follow a formal education or training route the following year⁷.

The National Plan for the Welsh language that will be developed by Medr, if implemented and supported with proper funding, can offer solutions to some of these challenges.

We note that the Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport and International Relations Committee held a [one-day inquiry in April 2024 into](#)

⁵ Ad-hoc statistical requests: 8 to 19 April 2024 | GOV.WALES

⁶ Ad-hoc statistical requests: 8 to 19 April 2024 | GOV.WALES

⁷ Ad-hoc statistical requests: 8 to 19 April 2024 | GOV.WALES

	<p>the 'Development of post-16 Welsh language provision', and although the committee has not yet reported, it will be important for this Committee to consider the evidence submitted to that inquiry too.</p>
<p>Equity of access</p>	
<p>11. Are some groups of learners disadvantaged by the current system (e.g. pupils from low-income households, learners with travel needs)?</p>	<p>Welsh-speaking learners in some areas are at a disadvantage as it is not possible for them to follow seamless Welsh-medium routes at present.</p> <p>Recent HESA data suggests that mature Welsh-speaking students (21+) are less likely to study through the medium of Welsh at university. Providers have reported that confidence, due to limited use of the Welsh language since leaving full-time education, also influences these patterns. This is particularly relevant in priority areas such as health and care.</p> <p>Local decisions about issues such as transport can inhibit access to Welsh-medium post-16 education, especially for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds and learners living in rural areas. The Coleg welcomes the fact that a spokesperson for the Welsh Government has indicated that a detailed review of the Learner Travel Measure will take place soon and will include consideration of the threshold for transport from home to school, as well as transport for pupils receiving their education through the medium of Welsh.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to accessibility when considering Medr's strategic responsibilities in</p>

	<p>'Promoting equality of opportunity', 'Encouraging participation in tertiary education' and 'Promoting tertiary education through the medium of Welsh'.</p>
<p>12. What support is available for learners to improve access (financial or otherwise)?</p>	<p>The Coleg offers undergraduate Scholarships to higher education students who study 40cr+ or 80cr+ of their course through the medium of Welsh. Over 500 incentive scholarships were awarded to new students in autumn 2024.</p> <p>There is no additional financial incentive at Masters level available to students since the Welsh Government's Welsh-medium postgraduate Bursary scheme was abolished in 2024. This directly affects the availability of provision in some subject areas at M level.</p> <p>In the school sector and further education and apprenticeship sector, there are currently no financial incentives available to encourage learners to study through the medium of Welsh.</p> <p>Reaching wider partnerships, which are funded by Medr, work to increase participation in higher education among under-represented groups including Welsh speakers. The Coleg is a member of the steering groups of reaching wider partnerships across Wales and contributes to specific projects. However, at present very few Welsh-medium and bilingual schools are targeted by the reaching wider partnerships, and this limits the Welsh-medium audience that can benefit from the programme.</p>

<p>13. 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?</p>	<p>There is regional variation in the information available about Welsh-medium and bilingual options at post-16 level. For example, in apprenticeships, the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership has mapped out apprenticeship routes and the Welsh-medium/bilingual provision, but other Regional Skills Partnerships have not done so.</p> <p>Learners from all areas should have access to information about all of the post-16 options available to them, and specific expectations should be placed on individual providers and key partners to identify and promote Welsh-medium routes clearly and consistently.</p> <p>With the process of amending the Statutory Guidelines for Local 16-19 Curricula, there is a natural opportunity to ensure consistent processes throughout Wales in relation to collating and distributing information about post-16 opportunities at local and regional levels. Over time, there will be a need for coherence between the new statutory guidelines, the requirements of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plans, Medr's statutory responsibilities and its National Plan for the Welsh Language, and the (proposed) National Framework for Welsh Language Education and Learning Welsh that forms part of the Welsh Language and Education Bill.</p>
<p>14. Are there any other equality issues?</p>	<p>This year, for the first time, the Coleg has received higher education and further education and</p>

	<p>apprenticeship data, which offers an insight into the personal characteristics of the individuals who study through the medium of Welsh. We only have a snapshot of wider equality issues, and the data will need to be monitored over a period of time to identify any specific trends.</p> <p>The Coleg wants to ensure that everyone has accessible and full access to Welsh-medium and bilingual education in the tertiary sector. The Coleg recognises that individuals with certain protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are under-represented among those studying in Welsh, and the Coleg undertakes to reverse that under-representation, including by attracting more people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds to Welsh-medium and bilingual tertiary education.</p>
<p>Post-16 destination data</p>	
<p>15. 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?</p>	<p>As stated in our initial advice to Medr, <i>'Weaknesses in the way Welsh-medium and bilingual provision is defined, recorded and measured impedes planning and progress.'</i></p> <p>And these are the relevant aims outlined by the Coleg in our advice to Medr:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Aim 6.1: For planning purposes in the short to medium term, a baseline is established to measure the situation of the current Welsh and bilingual provision across the sector.</i> • <i>Aim 6.2: For the medium to long term, a correct and consistent method of identifying</i>

and recording learners' Welsh skills is developed, based on the proposed Code and including measuring progress over time.

- *Aim 6.3: For the medium to long term, a correct and consistent method of defining and recording Welsh medium and bilingual provision across the sector is developed.*
- *Aim 6.4: The data system allows learners to be tracked throughout their education or tertiary training.*

One of the main issues with data at present is inconsistency. Data about language skills is inconsistent and is not easily shared between sectors. Higher education institutions receive information about language skills too late and are reliant on students self-reporting language skills at enrolment. As a result, Welsh speakers do not always receive relevant information about Welsh-medium opportunities and support, and many slip through the net.

In the further education and apprenticeship sector, there is a lack of consistency in the way in which institutions define bilingual learning and distinguish between provision that is at B1, B2 and B3 level. The fact that sections of LLWR's data are published at learning activity level rather than individual learner level makes it very difficult to gain a complete picture of the data in the FE sector and poses a challenge in terms of data analysis. Having data at unique learner level only would be very useful and

	more consistent with the higher education sector and HESA data.
Welsh Government's role	
16. How effective is the Welsh Government's approach to support participation in the full range of post-16 education and training options?	<p>What is clear from our responses to the previous questions is the need for better coherence across all Government activity in relation to post-16 education and training and the statutory period that bridges the tertiary sector.</p> <p>The right environment and conditions need to be created to ensure that the tertiary sector contributes effectively to achieving the ambitions of the Cymraeg 2050 strategy and to providing a bilingual workforce for a wide range of sectors.</p>
17. Are learners, their families and schools aware of available Wales-wide support and programmes, such as the Young Person's Guarantee?	We have no evidence to report in response to this question.
18. Outcomes from Dr Hefin David MS's 'Transitions to Employment' report .	<p>The title and content of the report 'Transitions to Employment' is very relevant to the context of the Welsh language, and is consistent with the Coleg's vision for the post-16 sector.</p> <p>We welcome the report, and recommendation 9 in particular, which states:</p>

'Alongside the other recommendations, an element of Welsh language awareness and skills should be included as appropriate for all learners regardless of their Welsh language skills. Welsh language awareness and skills includes: increasing awareness of Wales as a bilingual nation; promoting the advantages of bilingual skills in the workplace; and introducing or consolidating Welsh language skills including relevant vocabulary and key phrases for the workplace.'

Opportunities to undertake Welsh-medium apprenticeships (at all levels) are currently rare, and holistic planning and additional investment are needed in order to develop opportunities in areas where there is a great demand for Welsh language skills such as Health and Care, Childcare and Public Services.