

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 14

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Llywodraeth Leol Cymru a Cymdeithas Cyfarwyddwyr Addysg Cymru

Response from: Welsh Government Association (WLGA) and Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW)

Welsh Local Government Association - The Voice of Welsh Councils

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) is a politically led cross party organisation that seeks to give local government a strong voice at a national level.

We represent the interests of local government and promote local democracy in Wales.

The 22 councils in Wales are our members and the 3 fire and rescue authorities and 3 national park authorities are associate members.

We believe that the ideas that change people's lives, happen locally.

Communities are at their best when they feel connected to their council through local democracy. By championing, facilitating, and achieving these connections, we can build a vibrant local democracy that allows communities to thrive.

Our ultimate goal is to promote, protect, support and develop democratic local government and the interests of councils in Wales.

We'll achieve our vision by

- Promoting the role and prominence of councillors and council leaders
- Ensuring maximum local discretion in legislation or statutory guidance
- Championing and securing long-term and sustainable funding for councils
- Promoting sector-led improvement
- Encouraging a vibrant local democracy, promoting greater diversity
- Supporting councils to effectively manage their workforce

Introduction:

This paper responds to the call for evidence by the *Senedd's Children, Young People and Education Committee's* inquiry into *Routes into Post 16 Education and Training*.

Aside from 6th form provision in schools (not present in all local authorities as some have a tertiary education system), local government has limited input into post 16 education and training provision (and, particularly, post 18), which is primarily the remit of colleges of further education, training/work based learning agencies and universities, all of which (including 6th forms) now fall within the remit of Medr, the Post 16 regulator.

However, as well as providing some bespoke provision where required (mostly as a stop-gap measure, prior to successful brokerage of relevant post 16 courses), local government does provide a great deal of support, advice and guidance to young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or who are showing as being at risk of becoming NEET, mainly via the *Youth Engagement & Progression Framework* (YEPF). This includes the co-ordination of the local YEPF partnerships, provision of lead workers (mostly youth via youth workers) and a brokerage function onto post-16 education and training, so local government input in (and prior to) this area is crucial.

The YEPF is described thus *"This Framework contributes towards our goal of tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment, by helping us re-engage young people and raise their aspirations, to ensure no one is left behind. It is built around the early identification of young people aged 11 to 18 who are at risk of becoming not in education, employment or training (NEET) or homeless, understanding their needs, putting appropriate support and/or provision in place and monitoring their progression."*

Local authorities via the Engagement & Progression Co-ordinators (EPC's), officers charged with co-ordinating the local YEPF, also continue to play a valued role with post 16 partners in the planning and co-ordination of the Young Person's Guarantee (YPG), meeting on a regular basis (locally and regionally) with providers to share information both strategically and at operational level.

Crucial in the journey of young people's learning is continuity of provision (learning pathways), particularly at the transition stage between statutory education and post statutory education and training - between schools, colleges and training providers to ensure that young people are able to pursue learning pathways which offer progression, challenge and reward, as well as destinations which are productive for them as individuals, for institutions, for the economy and wider society.

As with previous/recent responses provided in regard to Post 16 education, including the development stage of Medr, the WLGA and ADEW have consistently mentioned that, whilst Medr continue to make assurances that local government will have a voice in their work with post 16 providers, this part of the sector does not have representation on the Medr Board.

Context:

1. In order to ensure a coherent pre and post 16 education system, all relevant partners must have knowledge and oversight of and input into each other's work and, where relevant, collaborate to ensure a good quality, comprehensive offer which provides learning options relevant to both learners and the economy and avoids duplication. In this regard, Regional Skills Partnerships also play a crucial role in providing the relevant links to employers and labour market intelligence, ensuring that courses are providing the relevant skills base for employers by providing accurate and up-to-date labour market information.
2. Given the extremely challenging public sector funding situation, services and the work-force delivering services are coming under increasing strain, with less money at the same time as ever increasing demand. As well as a reduction in capacity across the sector as we emerge from the Covid pandemic (which continues to further exacerbate the situation) there is a recruitment and retention crisis compounding an already challenging scenario. These factors are converging to impact on the ability of services to effectively engage with children, young people and their families/carers, many of whom continue to suffer under the cost-of-living crisis, to either avoid them finding themselves on the margins of services and/or when they find themselves in difficult circumstances, carrying out the intensive work necessary to overcome barriers to accessing even basic provision.
3. Given local government's role in post 16 education, much of this paper describes the breadth and depth of the challenges and conditions which need to be in place to enable young people to access post 16 learning but it is also crucial that relevant courses are made available at appropriate levels to meet need. The education system has some levers and expertise in breaking down barriers to learning but it is being increasingly recognised that this is a much wider, societal issue which can only be addressed via a much more holistic approach involving other public and voluntary sector partners, particularly around cost-of-living issues and mental and physical health, which is playing a huge part in low levels of attendance across the system. A great deal of work is going on in schools and other education settings to address such issues but a whole system approach is needed.
4. Whilst this paper paints a picture of extremely challenging circumstances, the sector remains resilient and innovative in its attempts to ensure young people are ready and able to continue their learning at post 16 level. Local government politicians and officers regularly engage in such discussions at local, regional and national levels to ensure that every part of the system is playing its part and is sharing good practice as well as learning from other evidence in regard to successful interventions – due to the complexity of many people's lives, this requires quite bespoke solutions, which require time, effort and resource.
5. Before reflecting on physical routes to post 16 learning provision, it is crucial to highlight conditions which need to be in place for young learners to be able to do so effectively, if at all. Issues of pre-16 attendance, behaviour and well-being in schools are well documented and discussed, with numerous both tried, and

tested as well as new and innovative methods used. Following the pandemic, anxiety in children and young people is at unprecedented levels, many not even being able to leave home and numbers of home educated children and young people are increasing at rates not previously seen. This requires intensive input based on trusting relationships with professionals, which requires space and time to develop. Anxiety alongside neurodiversity can further complicate challenges.

6. Science and society continue to learn more about neurodiversity (ND) and how this can affect (positively and negatively) people's experiences and opportunities. How society can and should adapt to and encourage different neuro and physical abilities and conditions is an area which requires support of the health sector. Though Initial Teacher Education (ITE) is changing to improve understanding, training and professional learning in this area often does not match need and/or demand. There is also concern that the 'social contract' between parents, pupils and schools is changing, accompanied with a higher level of expectation (in some cases entitlement) about what the education system can provide. Whilst the system does its very best to accommodate this, it is not always possible to meet such high demands.
7. Further, whilst supported by the education sector in principle, the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Act continues to be costly and challenging, particularly to schools and local authorities. Such challenges are compounded by developmental delay in many young people as a result of the Covid pandemic, requiring the education system to readjust in numerous ways. Not all colleges are able to meet requirements in Individual Development Plans (IDP's), which can put further strain on local government resources and/or mean that a young person is unable to take up a potential place. This situation is also an issue in the context of training agencies, particularly if a small provider.
8. Even in circumstances where provision meets need, in the context of levels of anxiety and greater awareness of ND, some young learners find the 'step up' and scale of college environments too daunting, especially if they struggle to leave their home. This requires a greater level of support, time and patience whilst being aware that the longer they are out of education, the more difficult it can be to return, with many behaviours becoming entrenched and more complex.
9. There are a number of routes for learning at post 16, some academic and others either vocational and/or a mixture of both, including apprenticeships. The availability and quality of information available to learners, whilst crucial in providing an overview of learning options (where they are located, potential progression routes and course content) though can be patchy. Where this is in place, it needs to be accessible (via a range of mediums including online, up-to-date and comprehensive). Careers Wales play a crucial role in the provision of education/careers information and advice and local government welcomes the recent announcement that Careers Wales is opening its offer wider to all learners in years 10 and 11 as pupils from all backgrounds and abilities need good quality and relevant careers advice and guidance, delivered in numerous engaging ways.

10. Post 16 destination data is provided by Careers Wales but it is felt that this is not always up-to-date and there are very few organisations either equipped to (relevant skill sets and working practices) and/or willing to make the strenuous efforts required to find those hardest to reach/"unknowns", as this requires (often persistent) home visits to establish their status and engage. This often falls to front line local government staff (EPC's and/or youth workers), which means going over and above general working practice.
11. Youth information (generally but including education related) is something which Welsh Government and the Youth Work Implementation Board is looking as there has not been a national youth information portal for some years. A couple of good examples of an information portal for learners looking to access post 16 learning can be found here [Welcome to Caerphilly Pathways](#) and here <https://www.llywybraugwyneddynysmon.cymru/>
12. As described by a case study of a young person in Gwynedd below, in some, often particularly rural, areas transport can be a huge barrier to accessing education provision (as well as leisure and recreation services). Often, even if public transport is in place in certain areas and runs to plan, multiple changes of buses and/or trains are often required which can take considerable time, effort and capability either way. If services do not run to plan or are cancelled, this can cause distress as well as time missed from courses.
13. If transport is in place and the young person is at the stage whereby they can consider accessing an education programme, there is concern across the sector around availability of these at appropriate levels to meet the learner's ability. As already described, the sector is seeing increasing numbers of young people who are either behind in their emotional development and/or experiencing mental health/behavioural issues. Due to time away from education (including some from the home education community), many of these learners are also behind in their educational journey/age related levels. This means that, at post 16 level, demand is increasing for transition/pre-entry level courses but, whilst this has been recognised in the JGW+ programme where a pre-engagement strand has been put in place, demand is currently out-stripping supply.
14. For some young people aged 14-16 a more vocational pathway is required, which can also act as a useful preparatory step to post 16 provision, whereby learners are exposed to college environments at an earlier age and, therefore become more used to the requirements in these settings, which can be quite different to those in school. Where Welsh Government funding has supported this in the past, following recent changes to the Education Improvement Grant, these courses are at risk.
15. An example of the above is in Gwynedd and Ynys Mon where the two local authorities have established a consortium commissioning such (14-16) courses on behalf of schools in these areas. As a result, a close and positive relationship has been established with the local colleges of FE. However, the changes in the grant mean that funding goes directly to schools which may have consequences for small schools, the partnership developed with the colleges and learner choice, potentially also resulting in an increase in the numbers of young people NEET.

16. As identified by Hefin David (MS) in his report *Transitions to Employment (2023)* meaningful work experience can be crucial for a young person to gain a better understanding of the requirements of the workplace, often long before entering the employment sector. The WLGA and ADEW agree that this important phase in a young person's education needs looking at. However, this can be resource intensive as placements in industry need to be identified and assessed as appropriate for young learners under the age of 16 or 18. This can take time, resource and expertise which schools struggle to find.
17. Neath Port-Talbot reintroduced work experience for pre-16 learners a couple of years ago and the evidence from this shows that those who participate have greater understanding of the skills they need in the workplace and are actively seeking the pathways and qualifications that can help them with careers into sectors they are interested in. A few of the young people have also been offered apprenticeships when they leave school, based on these placements. However, this is currently funded from the Shared Prosperity Fund, which may render it unsustainable if/when this funding is cut.
18. Prior to 2015, the responsibility for work experience placements was within the Careers Wales remit. This was then taken on by local government (often via the 14-19 Local Area Network, LAN) and now schools. There does not appear to be a central driver for work placements currently, meaning that many learners (particularly those who are not from families with motivated and well-connected parents) miss out.
19. It is also crucial that, if a young person has successfully started a post-16 course but, for whatever reason, this has broken down and the young person stops attending, every effort is made by the provider to establish the reason/s for this and that potential barriers to attendance are removed. This may also require a swift referral to the EPC, so that they can investigate and work with the young person and provider to get them back on track. This requires close communication between provider and the local authority via the tracking element of the YEPP.

Case Study - Young Person A:

- Young Person's attendance at school declined during Year 9, she did not attend a lot during Year 10 and was on a reduced timetable in Year 11.
- Careers Wales provided advice and guidance and she applied for a pre-vocational course with the local college of Further Education (attending would entail at least a 45 min bus journey from her place of residence). Young Person was not expected to achieve the required grades to move on to a Level 1 Course in subjects that interested her.
- She was identified during Year 11 Transitions Panel as being at risk of not transitioning to Post 16 education.
- Careers Wales referred her to Gwynedd Youth Support over the Summer period and to help prepare for College, but young person stated that had secured a job in the Hospitality Sector over the Summer Holidays and was happy with how things were going. It was agreed with young person that Gwynedd Youth would keep in touch with her.
- At the beginning of September, young person decided that she did not want to pursue the pre-vocational course. An alternative option would be an entry level course in another Campus (a Bus journey that would take about an hour one-way).
- Arrangements were made for the young person to attend College to learn more about the course, visit the college campus and meet the tutors and student Support service.
- Young person was registered to start the course but did not attend, stating that the College Campus was too large, bus journey was too long and the expectation of attending College 4 days a week was too much to start with.
- Young Person is currently working 2-3 hours a week in the Hospitality sector, but due to the nature of the Tourist Season in her area, there are not a lot of work opportunities at this time of year. She is now looking at her employment options. JGW+ programme has been explored and would be a good option, but the provision has one centre in Caernarfon, serving all of Gwynedd which can be too challenging for young people living in more rural areas.

20. The young person above also has siblings who have had a similar journey. Her younger brother is attending school and her older sister is attending college and is planning on moving on to University next year. She's found going back to a regular school routine after Covid really challenging.

21. Young People who have struggled with attendance or have been EHE find it challenging to transition to a full-time timetable, busy campus, packed college bus or Public transport. Young people want to progress with their education and view Post 16 options as a new start after difficult times at school. The step for them can often be too big, requiring a graduated provision which offers a more flexible approach to support their transition back to full-time education.